

## MANAGING HAYFEVER

**Hay fever affects around one in four people in the UK. Maureen Jenkins, Clinical Director of Allergy UK, offers some tips on avoiding the causes and reducing your symptoms.**

"The main triggers of hay fever are tree and grass pollen," says Maureen. "Pollen from weeds and shrubs can also trigger symptoms. The pollen count is always higher on hot, dry days. Fungal spores are around on most mild damp days, but are particularly high after harvesting and in the autumn."

The following tips can help you avoid pollen and lessen the chances of hay fever.

### **Don't mow your lawn**

Ideally, if grass makes you sneeze, ask someone else to mow your lawn when the pollen count is high. "If you react to grass and you spend time on the lawn, you'll get breathing symptoms and often also hives," says Maureen.

### **Create a barrier**

Smear a nasal barrier balm inside your nostrils, or use a drug-free nasal spray or dab of petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) to prevent pollen sticking to the lining of your nose. Ask your pharmacist about nasal barrier balms and nasal sprays.

### **Time it right**

If possible, avoid outside activity when the air is warming up and cooling down as pollen count is highest at these times, around 8-10am and 5-7pm.

### **Shut the windows**

Don't drive with the windows open, as this will allow pollen to come in. Open bedroom windows at night, but close them when you get up in the morning.

### **Damp dust regularly**

Dusting with a damp or microfibre cloth will collect dust and stop any pollen from becoming airborne.

### **Wash your hair**

"Pollen is sticky and may be in your hair," says Maureen. "It can then transfer to your pillow and affect you during the night. If you've been out in the evening, wash your hair and change your clothes before going into the bedroom."

### **Vacuum**

Pollen can live in carpet, so make sure you vacuum regularly.

**Allergy UK helpline:  
01322 619898**

## **Think about your medication**

Talk to your GP or pharmacist about your hay fever, if your symptoms are not controlled by your current treatment.

"Non-sedating antihistamines may be adequate for mild or intermittent hay fever symptoms, but many people will need to use a steroid nasal spray (available from a pharmacy or prescribed by a GP) to treat the inflammation in the nose caused by hay fever," says Maureen. "This must be used regularly, and relief will be felt after a few days. It should be continued once or twice daily until the hay fever season is over."

## **Start treatment early**

"Most people wait until symptoms start before they begin treatment, but the nasal spray needs to be started at least two weeks before symptoms appear, so that the medication is already in your system when pollen triggers your hay fever," says Maureen. "Take your antihistamine as soon as your symptoms start."

Think back to previous years to work out when your hay fever usually starts, so you can try to identify what triggers your symptoms. "For example, grass pollen is in the air from May until August, so you could start taking a steroid nasal spray in April," says Maureen. "Or earlier if you have symptoms from tree pollens." Read more about the pollen count, which is a major cause of hay fever symptoms.

You can also talk to your GP or call the Allergy UK helpline **01322 619898** for more advice.

## **Don't ignore Hay Fever**

Hay fever can make everyday life miserable and tiring, with sneezing, watery eyes, runny nose and an itchy throat. However, many hay fever treatments are available from your GP, and symptoms need to be controlled as hay fever can also cause asthma attacks or increase your risk of developing asthma.

"There is a strong link between hay fever and asthma," says Maureen. "If you have a food allergy, eczema or hay fever, you're more likely to develop asthma, so it's important to take hay fever seriously and treat the symptoms adequately to prevent asthma symptoms."

There are many hay fever treatments, and symptoms can be controlled.