

Self-care information on...

Treating hay fever in children



This leaflet should be read in conjunction with ‘Self-care information on...Hay fever’

Does your child have hay fever?

Hay fever can sometimes be confused with a virus. The way to tell the difference is by how long the symptoms last. If it is a virus, the symptoms should only last for a week or two. If your child has a constant runny nose and is sneezing every day for part of the year but not in the winter, it is a sign that they may be allergic to something.

If your child only has symptoms in July and August on a very sunny day, it is almost certainly hay fever.

Hay fever symptoms vary in severity and symptoms may be worse some years than others, depending on the weather conditions and the pollen count. Hay fever symptoms are likely to be worse if the pollen count is high.

The pollen count is usually given as part of the weather forecast during the spring and summer months. Your child’s symptoms may start at different times of the year depending on which types of pollen they are allergic to. While symptoms of hay fever may be mild, they can interfere with sleep and your child’s daily activities at school.

How do you treat hay fever in children?

Pollen Avoidance

To reduce your child's exposure to pollens:

- Keep windows closed at night so pollen does not enter the house.
- Buy your child a pair of wraparound sunglasses to stop pollen entering their eyes.
- Smear petroleum jelly around the inside of your child's nose to trap pollen and stop it being inhaled.
- Wash your child's hair, face and hands when they come back indoors and change their clothes.
- Do not let them play in fields or large areas of grassland.
- Use air filters to try to reduce pollen that is floating around the house.
- Keep the car windows shut when driving.

Symptoms are usually worse first thing in the morning and early evening, particularly on days that have been warm and sunny.

Hay fever medicines

Many hay fever medicines are available to buy from supermarkets and pharmacies. However, these products may not always be suitable for children. Always check the product is suitable for the child you are intending to treat before buying it. If you are unsure which product is most suitable, ask your local pharmacist.

The table over the page provides some examples of hay fever medicines and highlights which ones can be bought for use in children.

- **Antihistamines**

Antihistamines help block the effects of one of the chemicals released during an allergic reaction. This prevents the symptoms of an allergic reaction occurring. They are often effective in relieving symptoms such as itching, sneezing and watery eyes and can be taken when required or regularly to prevent symptoms occurring. They can cause drowsiness.

- **Eye drops**

Eye drops, containing anti-inflammatory medicines, may help treat watery, itchy and red eyes. They can cause mild stinging and burning of the eyes.

- **Steroid nasal sprays**

Steroid nasal sprays can only be bought from supermarkets and pharmacies for use in adults (over 18 years old). They are only available for children on prescription.

What can you buy for use in children?

Type of medicine	Examples of products available to buy	Age available to buy for	Available from	Approximate cost
Anti-histamine	Chlorphenamine tablets e.g. Piriton [®] tablets	6yrs +	Pharmacies only	From £3.49 for 28 tablets
	Chlorphenamine liquid e.g. Piriton [®] syrup	1yr +	Pharmacies only	From £3.29
	Cetirizine tablets e.g. Zirtek [®] Allergy Relief tablets	6yrs+	Pharmacies & supermarkets	From £1 for 14 tablets
	Cetirizine liquid e.g. Zirtek [®] Allergy Solution	2yrs+	Pharmacies only	From £4.99
	Loratadine tablets e.g. Clarityn Allergy [®] tablets	2yrs+ if >30kg	Pharmacies & supermarkets	From £1 for 14 tablets
	Loratadine liquid e.g. Clarityn Allergy [®] syrup	2yrs+	Pharmacies & supermarkets	From £4.99
Eye drop	Sodium cromoglicate eye drops 2% w/v e.g. Allercrom [®]	6+	Pharmacies & supermarkets	From £5.49
Steroid nasal spray	Beclometasone nasal spray	18yrs+	Not available to buy for children	From £5.49
	Fluticasone nasal spray	18yrs+	Not available to buy for children	From £5.49

When to contact your GP practice

Most symptoms of hay fever can be managed using medication from a pharmacy or supermarket.

If you are unclear which treatment would be best for your child, or if your child already takes medication for other conditions, your local pharmacist can advise on appropriate treatments.

Your child would normally only need to visit their GP practice if:

- Symptoms cannot be controlled with medications you have purchased or they are having troublesome side effects caused by the medication.
- They are experiencing worsening of asthma, wheezing or any shortness of breath.
- The pattern of their symptoms is unusual; such as occurring during the winter. It is likely that a substance other than pollen is responsible and further testing may be required to confirm this.
- If your child is under 2 years old.

If you need any further information:

- Ask your pharmacist
- NHS choices: www.nhs.uk
- Patient UK www.patient.co.uk

