



Self-Care – Hay Fever Guidance in Care Homes

Taking care of your “SELF” – Supporting Everyone to Live Freely

This is a self-care guide designed for those working in care homes, residential homes and assisted living accommodation.

The information provided in this guide does not replace person-centred clinical advice.

The following information should be used as a guide when advising or purchasing self-care treatments for people residing in a care home, residential home or assisted living accommodation. Self-care medication and medical products are not always the most appropriate choice for treating minor ailments. Sometimes starting with a lifestyle change or trying natural remedies can be more effective.

Should you have any concern, at any time around self-care items being purchased on behalf of the resident or being brought in by relatives for the residents use, please discuss with your community pharmacist or GP practice.



Knowing that it's hay fever and nothing more serious:

Before offering self-care advice to any resident, please ensure that the resident has a history of hay fever. For any resident who does not usually suffer from seasonal hay fever and who experiences a quick onset of hay fever-like symptoms, **you will** need to seek the advice of the pharmacist or GP to confirm the diagnosis.

What causes hay fever?

Hay fever is a common allergic condition that occurs when a person has an allergic reaction to pollen. Pollen is a fine powder released by plants as part of their reproductive cycle, the tiny pollen particles then come into contact with the cells that line the mouth, nose, eyes and throat, they irritate them and trigger an allergic reaction.



Symptoms of hay fever include:

- Sneezing and coughing
- A runny or blocked nose
- Itchy, red or watery eyes
- Itchy throat, mouth, nose and ears
- Loss of smell
- Pain around your temples and forehead
- Headache
- Earache
- Feeling tired.

If the resident has asthma, they may also:

- Complain or show signs of having a tightness in their chest
- Being short of breath
- Wheezing and coughing.

For any resident with asthma and hay fever you may want to seek best advice from the local community pharmacist.

Please note that the above symptoms may present if the resident is suffering another, more serious condition. If you have any concerns, at any time that the resident is experiencing a more serious reaction or that their condition may not be hay fever, please contact the resident's local pharmacist or the GP practice for advice.

Allergic reaction

When a person experiences an allergic reaction, their body overreacts to something it perceives as a threat. In hay fever, the allergen (the substance you're allergic to) is pollen. The immune system (the body's natural defence) responds as if it were being attacked by a virus.

The immune system will release a number of chemicals designed to prevent the spread of what it wrongly perceives as an infection. These chemicals cause the symptoms of the allergic reaction, such as watering eyes and a runny nose.

It's unclear what causes the immune system to react in this way, but there are several factors that can increase your risk of developing hay fever.



They include:

- Having asthma or another allergic condition, such as eczema
- Having a family history of hay fever
- Being exposed to tobacco smoke and diesel exhaust particles during early childhood.

Most people with hay fever are allergic to grass pollen, but it can also be caused by trees and weeds. Pollution, cigarette smoke and car exhaust fumes, can make allergies worse.

When is there most pollen?

Different trees and plants produce their pollen at different times of the year. Depending on which type of pollen you are allergic to, you may experience hay fever symptoms at different times. In the UK, the pollen count season is usually separated into three periods:

- **Tree pollen** – late March to mid-May
- **Grass pollen** – mid-May to July
- **Weed pollen** – end of June to September

However, the pollen count season can sometimes begin as early as January or end in November. For example, depending on the weather conditions, sometimes there can be an "early spring" or a "long summer".

The effect of the weather

The amount of sunshine, rain or wind affects how much pollen plants release and how much it is spread around. On humid and windy days, pollen spreads easily. On rainy days, pollen may be cleared from the air, causing pollen levels to fall.

During pollen season, plants release pollen early in the morning. As the day gets warmer and more flowers open, pollen levels rise. On sunny days, the pollen count is highest in the early evening.

Fungi

Some people can also develop a hay fever-like allergy to fungi. Fungi can release tiny particles called spores, which can be inhaled in the same way as pollen.

Fungi spores are most widespread during periods of wet or damp weather. Fungi can also grow indoors in damp areas, such as under washing machines or sinks.



Natural remedies and self-help tips:

While there is no firm evidence to support the effectiveness of natural remedies many people do find benefit in using them. You may want to discuss the following natural remedies with residents as they may wish to purchase them or have you purchase them on their behalf.

Always ensure that there are no interactions between medications and natural remedies before use. You can seek advice from the resident's community pharmacist.

A spoonful of honey

- This remedy takes some time to reap the rewards but honey produced locally can help towards immunity to pollen allergens
- Local bees frequent local plants to gather local pollen, the same pollen that is causing an allergic reaction
- Eating local honey throughout the year is thought to build up immunity to the pollen allergens and thereby reducing the allergic symptoms.

Tea time (there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of the below. However herbal and holistic approaches to hay fever are noted to be effective on an individual basis)

- Ginger tea (with raw honey) is good for breaking up congestion in the chest and loosening phlegm
- Green tea blocks the production of histamine and builds the immune system
- Peppermint tea relieves both nasal and sinus congestion
- Nettle tea helps relieve respiratory tract inflammation, and eases nasal congestion, itching and sneezing
- Chamomile tea is also reputed to relieve hay fever symptoms, and smearing chamomile and lemon oil on a cloth and inhaling is believed to prevent hay fever symptoms
- Showering and changing clothes after being outdoors to remove the pollen staying indoors when the pollen count is high (over 50 grains per cubic metre of air)
- Applying a small amount of petroleum jelly to the nasal openings to trap pollen grains.



The do's and don'ts of preventing hay fever symptoms worsening:

What to do	What not to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Petroleum jelly can be applied around the nostrils, this will provide a barrier and trap pollen particles entering the airways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leave windows open when grass has been freshly cut outside the home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If a resident is going outside or going out for the day with a relative or friend, you could advise the use of wraparound sunglasses as these will prevent pollen particles aggravating the eyes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't spend as much time outside if symptoms of hay fever are present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A shower and washing of clothes when a resident has been out for the day will help to wash away the pollen particles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be aware that fresh flowers bought or purchased by relatives can trigger hay fever symptoms. If a resident suffers from hay fever you may want to advise not to have flowers in their room
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If hay fever symptoms are quite bad then you may want to advise the resident staying indoors if the pollen count is particularly high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smoking or being around second hand smoke can worsen hay fever symptoms. Avoid where possible if symptoms are worsening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close windows and doors to reduce chance of pollen coming inside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drying clothes outdoors can trigger hay fever symptoms as pollen clings to the materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth to catch pollen particles 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advise the resident stocks up on soft tissues if they have runny nose and eyes 	

Over the counter treatments:

If holistic treatments are not effective, the resident may want to purchase some self-care over the counter treatments. It is advised that symptoms are discussed with the resident's local community pharmacy to see what would be most suitable for use.

Please note if you are not dealing with the resident's usual pharmacy then you will need to take a list of the resident's current medications so the pharmacist can ensure there are no drug interactions



Examples of some over the counter treatments available in pharmacies, supermarkets and shops:

- **Steroid nasal sprays** – used to help prevent or reduce inflammation in the lining of the nose and some sprays may also relieve watery eyes. Steroid nasal sprays can take a few days before they are effective
- **Antihistamines** – for the relief of a runny nose, sneezing, itching and watering eyes. Sometime antihistamines can have a drowsy effect and different antihistamines work on different people so it is about finding the one that works. If it does have a drowsy effect then it may be better to take at bedtime
- **Decongestant nasal sprays** – can be used to unblock the nasal passage. These sprays should never be used for more than a few days at a time or the resident may suffer rebound congestion
- **Eye drops** – used for the relief of itchy eyes
- **Salt water** (saline) solution (for irrigation of the nose to help with nasal symptoms).

You should always discuss with the resident or resident relatives as to what usually works for them and assist accordingly.

It is always advisable to speak with the community pharmacist for advice before purchasing any of the above treatments. Not all over the counter treatments are suitable for all patients and the pharmacist will be able to give better advice if they are aware of the resident's symptoms and current medication.

If you have concerns, at any time or if the hay fever symptoms are worsening you should contact the community pharmacist or GP practice immediately for further advice.

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References:

NHS Choices - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/>

PrescQIPP - <https://www.prescqipp.info/resources/category/143-self-care-hayfever>

Goodness Direct BLOG - <https://www.goodnessdirect.co.uk/blog/natures-cure-8-natural-remedies-for-hay-fever/>