

Is nature out to get you?

An allergy survival guide for dealing with triggers and symptoms.





Why do you get allergic reactions?

If you an allergy sufferer, you aren't alone. In fact, allergies affect more than a quarter of people in the UK at some point in their lives. No wonder so many of us are coughing, sneezing and nose trumpeting into a Kleenex. First off, let's look at what causes an allergic reaction.

The answer involves your immune system – your body's natural defence system against infection. Under normal circumstances your immune system produces antibodies that go to war against foreign bodies such as bacteria and viruses. But when it comes to allergies, it's a case of mistaken identity.

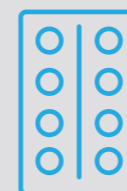
Allergic reactions happen because the immune system mistakes something that is actually harmless for an unwanted foreign body. The immune system overreacts and produces a chemical called histamine to fight it.

Histamines act like bouncers outside a night club. Their job is to get rid of the allergy trigger – such as dust, mould or pollen particles that have entered the body through the mouth, nose, skin or eyes – as swiftly as possible. And they'll do whatever it takes to get the job done, making you itch, swell up, cough and sneeze. Gesundheit!

Stop allergies from ruining your life

Hachoo! Oh no, the weather's changing and now your allergies are flaring up. Don't worry, we've written this helpful guide for people just like you.

So, put away your pocket tissues and check out our best advice for coping with your triggers and symptoms. It's time to stop allowing dust, mould, pets and pollen from making you miserable.



You've probably heard of antihistamines.

They're an over-the-counter medicine that can alleviate allergy symptoms. There are many different types so you may want to ask a healthcare professional about which one is right for you.

All about allergens

Substances that cause an allergic reaction are called allergens. Some people are lucky enough to go through life without any sensitivity. If you aren't one of them, you know all too well what it feels like when your body reacts to an allergen. Your symptoms may range from mildly annoying to life-flashing-before-your-eyes serious.

Most allergens are part of a family. If you're sensitive to one type of allergen, you'll probably react to other members of the same family. For example, if you're allergic to peanuts, you probably can't eat other tree nuts, such as almond, cashew or pine nuts.

Do you have any of these symptoms?

- Runny nose
- Rash
- Itchy eyes
- Nausea
- Stomach problems
- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Nosebleeds
- Asthma

There's an almost endless list of substances that can become an allergen, but here are a few of the most common offenders. Mother nature can be cruel.



Pollen

Flowers, grass, trees and weeds release microscopic particles into the air, causing hay fever.



Mould

Spores or particles released into the air can cause breathing problems.



Food

Many people are allergic to nuts, shellfish, dairy, tomatoes, wheat or eggs.



Animals

Fur, saliva or dead skin cells from pets can be the cause of allergic reactions.



Fruit

Latex allergy sufferers may also be allergic to fruits like bananas, which are technically part of the latex family.



Insects

Some people are allergic to venom from insects such as bees and wasps, often with severe reactions.



Medicine

Painkillers and antibiotics are the most common types of medicines that cause allergies.



Chemicals

Laundry detergents, household cleaners and cosmetics can make people break out in hives.

Hating hay fever: the scourge of Britain

While the list of possible allergens is as long as your arm, the number one troublemaker is pollen. If you paid attention in Mrs Smythe's year four class, you'll remember that pollen is a fine powder released by plants as part of their reproductive cycle.

As the dreary winter months make way for spring and summer, one in five people in the UK begin to suffer from allergic rhinitis, called hay fever.

Cue millions of people with blocked noses who speak like they have a cork stuck up each nostril.

What is hay fever?

No bales of hay where you live? It doesn't mean you can't get hay fever. As you may already know, hay fever is an allergic reaction to tiny particles in the air such as those from plants, mites, fungal spores and pets.

As explained earlier, your body mistakes these harmless particles for a bacteria or virus invader – and your immune system goes on the warpath. A chemical called histamine is released into your bloodstream, causing you to have hay fever symptoms.

It feels just like having a cold. You may have a runny nose, repeated sneezing, itchy eyes and sinus pressure. It can even inflame the airways and set off an asthma attack.

Your hay fever symptom checklist

- ✓ Runny or blocked nose
- ✓ Sneezing
- ✓ Itchy, watery or swollen eyes
- ✓ Rash or itchy skin
- ✓ Itchy throat or roof of your mouth
- ✓ Itchy or sore ears
- ✓ Wheezing and coughing
- ✓ Sinus pain
- ✓ Headache
- ✓ Post-nasal drip, caused by excess mucus from your nose running down the back of your throat.

The pain of pollen

Interestingly, the time of year when your symptoms flare up can help explain which type of pollen allergy you have. Tree pollen, for example, usually starts in early spring, followed by grass pollen (which is the most common type of pollen allergen) in the early summer and weed pollen in early autumn.

The pollen seasons

The time of year when you suffer from hay fever may explain which type of pollen allergy you have.

Tree – late March to mid-May

Grass – mid-May to July

Weed – June to September

How to make a comeback

Sorry to break it to you but there's no cure for allergies. But you can fight back by managing your symptoms. The best way to cope with your allergy is to stay away from your triggers. No surprises there.

But what if you can't stay away from them? Pollen, dust or other environmental allergens are always difficult to avoid. This is where your healthcare professional can make all the difference.

If you speak to a clinician through Doctor Care Anywhere or at your local practice, he or she may prescribe medicines including antihistamines, decongestants, inhalers, eye drops or nasal sprays.

If the above treatments don't help, your clinician may suggest immunotherapy treatment, administered as injections. All the above medicines are designed to help desensitise you to your allergy triggers.



When it's really serious

The most severe allergic reaction is called **anaphylaxis** and it can be deadly. If you or someone you know has an anaphylactic reaction, you must get help right away and call 999. In some cases, the sick person will need a shot of adrenalin called epinephrine as soon as possible.

Doctor Care Anywhere is here to help

Whether you're suffering from hay fever or another allergy, you can call our doctors any time of the day throughout the year. As a Doctor Care Anywhere member, there's no extra cost to you.

During your appointment, your clinician will ask you a series of questions about your symptoms and general health. This is usually all that's needed to reach a diagnosis.

In most instances, your clinician will prescribe the most appropriate over-the-counter medicine to deal with your allergies. But if your symptoms are more serious, your clinician may refer you to a clinic to have a blood or skin prick test.

You should book a Doctor Care Anywhere appointment if your

- ✔ Over-the-counter medicine doesn't help
- ✔ Medication causes side effects
- ✔ Symptoms are severe
- ✔ Hay fever causes breathing difficulty

For more information about Doctor Care Anywhere, please visit our website: doctorcareanywhere.com