

HAY FEVER (Allergic Rhinitis)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT



DESCRIPTION

An allergic response to airborne allergens that affects the eyes, nose, sinuses, throat, and bronchial tubes in the lungs. The name is confusing since hay does not cause an allergic reaction and there is no fever. Attacks may flare up only in pollen season or last year round.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Itching, watery eyes.
- Frequent sneezing; stuffy nose with a clear discharge.
- Itching in the roof of the mouth.
- Wheezing (sometimes).
- Burning in the throat.

CAUSES

The body's immune system produces allergic antibodies which release a chemical called histamine, which in turn produces swelling and irritation in sensitive areas (nose, sinuses, eyes). Airborne allergens causing an allergic sensitivity include: Pollen from weeds, flowers, grasses and trees, mold, dust, mites, tobacco smoke and other air pollutants.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Medical history of allergic reactions, such as eczema or asthma.
- Smoking.
- Spring and autumn. Most plants produce pollen during these seasons.
- Family history of allergies.
- Weak immune system due to drugs or illness

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid second hand smoke.
- Avoid substances identified as causing symptoms.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Symptoms can be controlled with treatment, but condition may persist over a lifetime. It is usually more troublesome than disabling.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Sleeping difficulty and chronic fatigue.
- Susceptibility to other respiratory infections.
- Ear infections.

GENERAL MEASURES

Laboratory tests such as a blood count and allergy skin tests may be recommended, but are usually not required for diagnosis. Eliminate as many allergens in your environment as possible. Prepare your bedroom as follows if recommended:

- Empty the room of furniture, rugs or carpet, and drapes or curtains.
- Clean the walls, woodwork and floors with a damp mop. Wax the floor.
- Cover the box springs, mattress and pillows with plastic covers.
- Use only rugs that can be washed once a week.
- Use bedclothes that can be washed often, such as cotton sheets, washable mattress pads and synthetic fiber blankets. Don't use chenille bedspreads, quilts or comforters.
- Use wood or plastic chairs. Don't use stuffed chairs.
- Use plastic curtains, if possible. Dust them daily.
- Use a vacuum cleaner, damp rags, and a damp or oiled mop to clean the bedroom thoroughly once a week.
- Keep windows and doors closed as much as possible.
- Don't handle objects that are very dusty, such as books or stored clothing.
- Don't keep stuffed animals or toys in the house.
- Remove all pets (except fish) from the house if recommended.
- Wear a filter face mask during exposure to allergens, including during housecleaning.
- Install an air-purification unit in your home's heating and air-conditioning system, preferably a high efficiency particulate (HEPA) filter if recommended.
- Drive in air-conditioned car.
- Have someone else mow the lawn.

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MEDICATION

To reduce the body's allergic response, you may be prescribed:

- Antihistamines; decongestants; cortisone nasal spray; eye drops; cortisone tablets (severe cases only); cromolyn nasal spray; cromolyn nose drops. These medications relieve symptoms, but they don't cure hay fever.
- Desensitization injections for known allergens for severe or year-round cases may be recommended. Once allergens are known (through skin or blood tests), small amounts are injected periodically. This helps block the immune system from releasing the histamine. This process may take months or years for effective results.
- Over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants are sometimes effective.

ACTIVITY & DIET

No restrictions other than avoiding known allergens.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF..

- You have severe symptoms of hay fever that are interfering with your normal activities.
- Signs of possible infection, such as fever, headache, muscle aches, earache, chest pain, or thick, discolored nasal discharge appear. A sinus infection may be complicating the allergy.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs in treatment may produce side effects.
- Difficulty breathing

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