



HAYFEVER

Have you noticed your nose has started itching? Red, itchy eyes, congested nose and sinuses, sneezing and that stuff that drips down the back of your throat? Can't sleep because of the congestion, and tickling cough?

It could be hay fever. You can get it all year round, but more people tend to suffer in hay fever season, starting just around spring. Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, has become more common in Westernized countries. Up to 40% of New Zealanders have it. It is associated with significant reduction in work or school performance and quality of life. It results in up to 4% people losing time off work, and up to 40% reduction in work performance.

Hay fever can start as early as the age of 2 years. If both your parents have it, you have a 50% chance of getting it too.

An inflammation due to irritants in the environment

Hay fever is inflammation of the nose, throat, and upper air tubes caused by things in the environment. This causes swelling, itching and increased mucus.

Some people get it all year round. This is caused by dust mites, cockroach body parts and pet hair in the environment.

Seasonal hay fever starts from spring and is due to pollens. In summer, it is due to grasses.

The effect that food has on the immune system is often not realized. Often, gluten containing foods such as bread, baking and pasta will aggravate hay fever. So will milk and yoghurt in some people. And so will stress.

Allergic shiners and the allergic salute

People who have hay fever don't just sneeze or have an itchy nose, they can have an annoying cough caused by mucous dripping down the back of the throat – this is called "Post nasal drip". Some people have dark circles under their eyes. Doctors call these "allergic shiners".

When a person has a horizontal crease around the bridge of their nose, doctors suspect that they frequently perform "the allergic salute" – which is where the person wipes the nose upwards with the open palm of their hand.

Good reasons to treat hay fever

Hay fever should not be taken lightly because it can significantly affect quality of life by causing:

- Sleep disturbance – blocked nose, cough, post nasal drip
- Fatigue, the emotional burden of a chronic condition
- Missed days from work/school
- Learning problems

- Increased asthma, sinusitis, ear infections, rashes
- Reduced work performance, difficulty concentrating

How to treat hay fever

- Try to avoid dust mites, etc. Clean house and remove drapes and/or carpet in highly allergic homes.
- Medicines such as nasal sprays (steroids are the best), antihistamines and/or eye drops.
- Desensitization injections or drops.
- Diet is more important than you would think. Seventy percent of the immune system is situated around the bowel and its job is to monitor your environment and act to protect the person. In vulnerable people, if the immune system picks up unbalanced bowel flora, it will create more inflammation which comes out as hay fever. A Mediterranean diet with lots of fruit and vegies is best. Avoid gluten and dairy containing foods as well as processed foods.
- No alcohol. Women who take 14 drinks per week have increased risk.
- Avoid butter, margarine and processed foods, as it causes excessive Omega 6 which increases inflammation
- Take Omega 3 fish oil.
- Take probiotics
- Zinc and magnesium have antihistamine effects when correctly restored.

Finally, as well as the quality of life issues that sufferers of hay fever have, a good reason for treating it is because it will also reduce any tendency to asthma.