

## Patient Information Leaflet

### Treating your hayfever with OTC (over the counter) medicines

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#### **1. Introduction – hayfever**

This leaflet contains some basic information about hayfever and how you can treat it yourself using over the counter (OTC) medicines.

Hayfever is caused by the body reacting to pollen from grasses, flowers, trees and/or weeds as if it is harmful to the body. The body reacts by producing histamine. This causes the unpleasant symptoms we know as hayfever.

Symptoms can include some or all of the following:

- Itchy eyes/throat
- Sneezing, blocked/runny nose
- Watery, red eyes (allergic conjunctivitis)
- Headaches, blocked sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness
- The sensation of mucus running down the back of the throat, called post-nasal drip

#### **How do I know if I have hayfever or a cold?**

If your symptoms only last about a week it is/was probably a cold but if symptoms continue, then it is more likely to be hayfever. There isn't a cure for hayfever yet and you cannot prevent it, but there are some things you can do to help yourself.

**Hayfever can be treated without seeing the GP.** If you are experiencing common seasonal hayfever symptoms you should no longer go to your GP to get a prescription. Instead, you can buy over-the-counter (OTC) medication from a local pharmacy or supermarket.

Your local pharmacist will be able to advise you on the most appropriate treatment and if or when you should see a doctor for your symptoms. There are some age limits when buying OTC medications.

## SOME DO AND DONTs TO HELP

You can do things to ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high.

### Do

- put Vaseline around your nostrils to trap pollen
- wear wraparound sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes
- shower and change your clothes after you have been outside to wash pollen off
- stay indoors whenever possible
- keep windows and doors shut as much as possible
- vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth
- buy a pollen filter for the air vents in your car and a vacuum cleaner with a special HEPA filter

### Don't

- do not cut grass or walk on grass
- do not spend too much time outside
- do not keep fresh flowers in the house
- do not smoke or be around smoke – it makes your symptoms worse
- do not dry clothes outside – they can catch pollen
- do not let pets into the house if possible – they can carry pollen indoors

You can also visit: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever)

## 2. Changes to the prescribing of hayfever treatments

In 2018 following a national consultation and publication of NHS England guidance the following treatments are no longer available for GPs to prescribe to treat hay fever: antihistamine tablets and liquids (including cetirizine, loratadine, fexofenadine); steroid nasal sprays (including beclometasone) and sodium cromoglicate eye drops. More information is available on [the Frimley ICB website](#)

## 3. Common treatments

For **general hayfever symptoms** – such as sneezing, itchy throat, coughing - use simple **antihistamine tablets, capsules or liquid**. Antihistamines may cause drowsiness. **Loratadine and cetirizine** are available in both tablets and liquid and are taken usually once a day for those aged 12 yrs and over, or twice a day for younger children – see table below for age ranges. **Fexofenadine** tablets are also now available as an OTC medicine. **Acrivastine** is available as a capsule and can be taken up to 3 times a day.

The above antihistamines are referred to as “second generation” antihistamines and are less likely to cause drowsiness.

**Chlorphenamine** is available as a tablet and a liquid and is taken up to 4 times a day. It may cause drowsiness.

**DO NOT TAKE 2 ANTIHISTAMINES TOGETHER UNLESS RECOMMENDED BY YOUR DOCTOR.**

For **nasal symptoms** – such as runny nose, sneezing and congestion –those aged 18yrs and over may use a **steroid nasal spray**. This works by reducing inflammation in the nose and helps control allergic symptoms associated with hayfever. This will not produce immediate relief and can take 2-3weeks of regular use before full benefit is seen. For best results start using 2-3 weeks before the likely onset of symptoms and make sure you use it every day. A pharmacist can check your technique to help make sure you are using it correctly.

A steroid nasal spray can also ease eye symptoms. **Beclometasone, budesonide, fluticasone, mometasone and triamcinolone** are steroid nasal sprays available to purchase over the counter. These cannot be sold over the counter for children under 18 yrs old. They should be discarded 3months after first opening.

**Saltwater nasal sprays** may also help. The aim of saltwater sprays is to wash pollen out of the nostrils. This can sometimes help to reduce the need for steroid nasal sprays.

For **eye symptoms** ie, red watery itchy eyes – use **eye drops**. Eye drops containing **sodium cromoglycate** – can stop the release of histamine from cells to stop the watering and provide relief from itchiness. They need to be used regularly in both eyes to prevent symptoms. Sometimes they can make the vision blurry when first put in the eye(s) but this will clear. Sodium cromoglycate eye drops can be used throughout the hayfever season if needed. All eye drops should be discarded one month after opening to reduce risk of infection.

The following table shows some common OTC hayfever products that can be bought from a pharmacy and their suitability for children. Some are also available in smaller pack sizes from a supermarket or convenience store.

Form	Type	Drug name	Some common brand names	OTC license restrictions, suitability for children
Tablets, capsules or liquid	Antihistamine	Acrivastine	Benadryl Allergy Relief®	Capsules from age 12 yrs to 65 yrs
		Cetirizine	Benadryl Allergy®, Piriteze Allergy®, Zirtek Allergy Relief®	Syrup from 2yrs (depending on brand), tablets from 12 yrs
		Chlorphenamine	Piriton Allergy®, Pollenase®	Syrup from 1 year, tablets from 6 yrs
		Loratadine	Clarityn Allergy®	Syrup from 2yrs, tablets from 6 yrs
		Fexofenadine	Allevia®	Tablets from 12yrs
Nasal sprays	Steroid	Beclometasone	Beconase Hayfever®	From 18 yrs
		Budesonide	Benacort®	From 18 yrs
		Fluticasone	Flixonase®, Pirinase®,	From 18 yrs
		Mometasone	Clarinaze®	From 18 yrs
		Triamcinolone	Nasacort Allergy®	From 18 yrs
	Other	Saline	Sterimar® products	Some can be used from birth
Eye drops	Mast cell stabiliser	Sodium cromoglycate	Opticrom® allergy, Optrex Hayfever Relief®, Murine®, Allercrom®	From 6yrs.
	Decongestant and antihistamine	Xylometazoline and antazoline	Otrivine-Antistin®	From 12 yrs.

*For all medicines please make sure you read the information leaflet to make sure it is suitable for you and that you know how to use it correctly. If in any doubt, please speak to your local pharmacist – always mention any other medical conditions or if any medication being taken.*

#### **4. Frequently asked questions**

##### **My symptoms are not controlled**

If your hayfever symptoms are not controlled after 2-4 weeks, you may need to try a different treatment or need to add in another treatment. Some trial and error may be required to find the best combination of tablet/nasal spray and eye drop for you.

##### **How long do I need to take hayfever medication for?**

If you are taking hayfever medication regularly and your hayfever is well controlled on your current treatment, continue this treatment until the end of the pollen season.

##### **When should I seek further advice from my doctor's surgery?**

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