



Hay fever facts

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Hay fever facts - not to be sneezed at

- Around 16 million people are estimated to suffer from hay fever in the UK, affecting up to 28% of the UK population and 38% of teenagers.
- Teenagers with hay fever symptoms are 40% more likely to drop a grade between their mock and final exams - rising to 70% if they are taking a sedating antihistamine treatment. A survey showed that 28% of students taking hayfever medication were on a sedating antihistamine. ^[2]
- The peak age for the onset of hay fever is in adolescence, and as many as 63% of students surveyed reported hay fever symptoms. ^[2]
- The tree pollen season starts in January and runs through to mid May. Grass pollen starts in late May until August, with the peak in June and affects 95% of UK hay fever sufferers. Weeds such as nettle and dock can cause hay fever in August and fungal spores trigger symptoms in Autumn. ^[1]
- It's estimated that hayfever might cost the UK economy as much as £7.1bn in lost productivity. ^[3]
- The highest rates of hay fever are in the South and East, with rates in urban areas generally higher than those in rural ones. ^[1]
- Well-known sufferers include the Olympic Athlete Marlon Devonish, Jon Bon Jovi, Kate Winslet, Jennifer Lopez, Kate Lawler, Cameron Diaz, Steffi Graf, Leyton Hewitt and Tiger Woods.
- Over 75% of people reported that they would prefer a natural hay fever treatment and 72% would be happy for themselves or their child to try a natural product to help them to relieve their symptoms. ^[4]

References

1. Hay fever prevalence in the UK in 2020, 2040 and 2060, Prof. Jean Emberlin, National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit, University of Worcester. June 2009
2. Walker S, Khan-Wasti S, Fletcher M, Cullinan P, Harris J, Sheikh A. J Seasonal allergic rhinitis is associated with a detrimental effect on examination performance in United Kingdom teenagers: case-control study. Allergy Clin Immunol.2007
3. Hay fever Health Report, 2009, Opinion Matters
4. Stolen Lives 6 - The Allergic Rhinitis Report: The Impact of allergic rhinitis on people's lives. Survey of people with allergic rhinitis; Allergy UK. June 2009



Your hay fever

Hay fever, also known as SAR (seasonal allergic rhinitis), occurs when an allergen (pollen, dust mite or pet dander) enters the nose, grass pollen is the most common cause and tends to affect people every year in the grass pollen season from about May to July.

If the person has hay fever the body treats the allergen as a threat and the immune system releases a large amount of antibodies in response. The specific antibody is immunoglobulin E (IgE) which binds to mast cells and basophils containing histamine, this creates a sensitised immune system.

The next time the person gets into contact with the allergen, it activates the IgE bound to the mast cells, which in turn releases inflammatory mediators such as histamine (and other chemicals).

Hay fever is called seasonal allergic rhinitis because symptoms tend to occur at the same time, or in the same season, each year.

This histamine causes the inflammatory reaction and causes the well known symptoms of hay fever:

- frequent sneezing
- runny or blocked nose
- itchy, red or watery eyes (also known as allergic conjunctivitis)
- an itchy throat, mouth, nose and ears

Less commonly, you may experience:

- the loss of your sense of smell
- facial pain (caused by blocked sinuses)
- sweats
- headaches

Who gets hayfever?

Hay fever is very common, it is estimated to affect up to 28% of the UK population (Hay fever prevalence in the UK in 2020, 2040 and 2060, Prof. Jean Emberlin, National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit, University of Worcester. June 2009)

Hay fever often first develops in school age children and during the teenage years, symptoms return for a season each year, but it eventually goes away or improves in many cases (often after having had symptoms each season for several years). Hay fever tends to run in families, you are also more likely to develop hay fever if you already have asthma or eczema. Equally, if you have hay fever, you are more likely to develop eczema or asthma.

Will it help if I avoid pollen?

It is impossible to totally avoid pollen, however symptoms tend to be less severe if you reduce your exposure to pollen. The pollen count is the number of pollen grains per cubic metre of air, the pollen count is often given with TV, radio, internet or newspaper weather forecasts, a high pollen count is a count above 50. The following may help when the pollen count is high:

- Stay indoors as much as possible, keep windows and doors shut.
- Avoid cutting grass, large grassy places, and camping.
 - Shower and wash your hair after being outdoors, especially after going to the countryside.
 - Wear wrap-around sunglasses when you are out.
 - Keep car windows closed, and consider buying a pollen filter for the air vents in your car.
 - These should be changed at every service.



Your hay fever

Pollen Index

Pollen Calendar

A generalised pollen calendar can be developed from historical pollen count records to show when the main allergenic plants are likely to be in flower. These times will differ according to geographical location and height above sea level. The exact timing and severity of the pollen seasons will differ from year to year depending on the weather and on various biological factors.

Tree pollen forecasts

2nd of April until the 20th of May

Grass pollen forecasts

24th of May until the 5th of August

Weed pollen forecasts

6th of August until the 26th of August

Fungal spore pollen forecasts

27th of August until the 30th of November

Grass pollen is the main cause of hayfever in the UK and affects 95% of sufferers. There are many types of grass pollen and because of difficulty of identifying one from another, all grass pollens are grouped together.

Pollen Index and Pollen Forecasts

The Pollen Count is calculated by measuring the actual levels of pollen 'grains' per cubic metre of air and the data is gathered from pollen stations throughout the UK.

The pollen index is supplied through the National Pollen Network, and daily forecasts of anticipated pollen levels are made available. The index changes emphasis slightly during the season to reflect these various types of pollen and the pollen calendar guide above indicates the general spread of pollen release.

Pollen forecasts are calculated using gathered information, as well as local vegetation distribution, weather patterns and weather forecasts. The pollen forecast is usually given as LOW, MODERATE, HIGH or VERY HIGH. In the case of grass, LOW is less than 30 grains per cubic metre of air, MODERATE 30 to 49, HIGH 50 to 149 and VERY HIGH 150 or more.