



THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT LEARN & ADVISE



MODULE 2: JUNE 2015

Hayfever

One in five people suffer with hayfever at some point, and incidence rates are on the rise. The UK allergy remedies market is worth an estimated £117 million, but many sufferers are either not using the right treatment or are using their treatment incorrectly.



The medical term for hayfever is **seasonal allergic rhinitis**. In other words, it's an allergic condition that varies in prevalence depending on the time of year.

Hayfever develops when the **body's immune system reacts to pollen** as if were a harmful substance, like an infection. Produced by plants including grass, trees and weeds, pollen is harmless to most people. But for people with hayfever, contact with pollen triggers the body to release a type of antibody to attack the allergen (pollen). The immune system then releases chemicals, including histamine, to prevent the spread of what it thinks is an infection.

The symptoms and the severity of hayfever can vary widely from person to person.

Common symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Coughing
- Itchy eyes, ears, nose or mouth.

Many sufferers are often confused about whether they have a cold or hayfever. One of the key differences to look out for is how long the symptoms last for. A cold will usually clear up within two weeks, but hayfever symptoms will persist.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, assistants will:

- Be familiar with the symptoms of hayfever
- Understand how customers can prevent symptoms of hayfever
- Know the OTC treatments available
- Be able to respond to customers' different needs and advise them on the most suitable treatment choices.



This module is suitable for all members of the pharmacy team who wish to increase their knowledge of common conditions and their treatment options. This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by pharmacy teams as part of their ongoing learning. This module can also form part of your Team Tuesday training.



DID YOU KNOW?...
Hayfever affects up to one in five people.

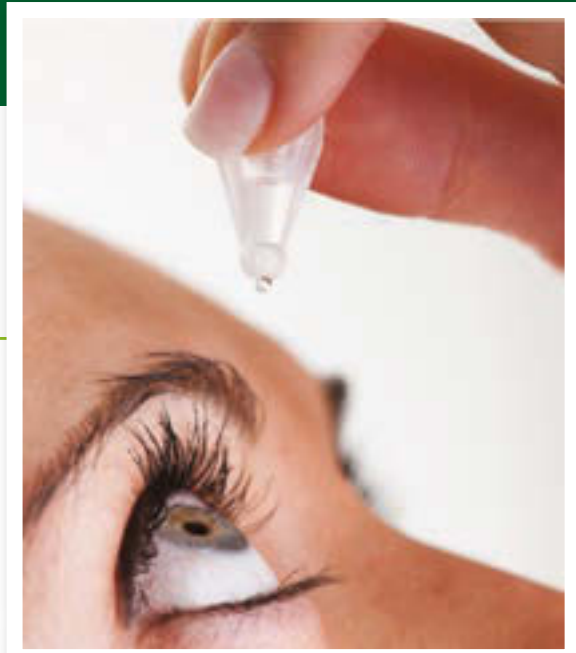
Treatment choices

You would be forgiven for thinking that hayfever is a fairly straightforward category for customers to navigate. However, 64 per cent of participants in a recent survey were confused about whether they were suffering from a cold or an allergy.

When it came to treatments, 62 per cent of hayfever sufferers surveyed said their current hayfever medication was ineffective, and only four per cent said it actually eliminated their symptoms. For the majority (60 per cent), medication only made their symptoms bearable.

In addition, of the 39 per cent of sufferers who used a steroid nasal spray, only 14 per cent were using it correctly. This means that for 86 per cent of patients, their nasal spray will be ineffective.

So there is clearly a need for pharmacy teams to engage customers and advise them on the most suitable treatment for their needs and, importantly, how to use that treatment.



Easing itchy eyes

Itchy, red and watery eyes are common symptoms of hayfever. A type of treatment called mast cell stabilisers (e.g. sodium cromoglicate) can help to manage these symptoms.

The body's mast cells contain histamine and play a central role in many different allergies.

As their name suggests, mast cell stabilisers work by stabilising mast cells, preventing them from releasing histamine and thus stopping allergic symptoms such as itchy, red and watery eyes from occurring. Examples include Opticrom Allergy and Optrex Allergy Eye Drops.



All-in-one relief

Some customers will prefer to use one product to treat their hayfever symptoms. Antihistamine tablets and syrups work by blocking the action of histamine, which is one of the chemicals released when a susceptible person encounters pollen. These products tend to start working quickly, relieve most allergy symptoms and can be taken as sufferers notice symptoms appearing or on a daily basis.

Oral antihistamines are separated into two groups:

- 1 Older compounds** – the most common example is chlorphenamine (e.g. Allercalm Allergy Relief, Piriton Allergy). This is a relatively non-specific antihistamine and one of its drawbacks is that it can cause drowsiness. Older antihistamines have a shorter duration of action and so need to be taken more frequently (e.g. every four to six hours). However, these products are often more affordable, which makes them appealing to some customers.
- 2 Newer compounds** – examples include acrivastine (e.g. Benadryl Allergy Relief), cetirizine (e.g. Benadryl One A Day, Benadryl Allergy Oral Solution, Piriteze Allergy Syrup, Pollenshield, Zirtek) and loratadine (e.g. Clarityn). Drowsiness is not usually a problem with these products, plus they tend to have a longer duration of action, so don't need to be taken so frequently.



Fast facts

- Hayfever is more common in boys than girls, but affects adult men and women equally
- The number of older people suffering from hayfever for the first time is rising
- A third of adults with hayfever say that symptoms have a considerable negative impact on their work, home and social life
- Children often find that their symptoms impact on their schooling, which can delay learning and development. In fact, many teenagers will drop at least one grade in their exams because of their allergy.



DID YOU KNOW?...

Hayfever is more likely to affect people with a family history of allergic conditions.

Track it!

Pollen levels (known as the pollen count) vary with the time of year and weather. In general:

- Tree pollen (e.g. birch) is released during spring. However, trees such as hazel and yew may cause symptoms as early as February, while oak pollen may persist into June
- Grass pollen is released at the end of spring and the beginning of summer and affects around 90 per cent of hayfever sufferers
- Weed pollen, such as nettle, is released from early spring through to late autumn.

Added advice

The best way to deal with allergies is to identify the source and avoid it where possible. This is quite difficult with airborne pollen, but there are things that sufferers can do to limit their exposure:

- Keep windows and doors closed, particularly in the early evening when the pollen count can be high
- Check the pollen count daily and stay indoors when it is high
- Avoid cutting the grass
- Wear wraparound sunglasses
- Apply a nasal barrier gel to prevent pollen from entering the nose.

Treating nasal congestion

In hayfever, one of the main symptoms is inflammation of the lining of the nose. There are various products that treat this symptom:

- 1 Corticosteroid nasal sprays** – examples include beclometasone dipropionate (e.g. Beconase), fluticasone propionate (e.g. Pirinase Hayfever Nasal Spray) and triamcinolone acetonide (e.g. Nasacort). These are often the first choice of treatment for people who experience regular allergy symptoms over a long period of time. They are effective against all allergy symptoms. For best results, the sufferer should start to use this medication a couple of weeks before the allergy season starts. They should then be used daily.
- 2 Decongestants** – such as oxymetazoline and xylometazoline relieve nasal congestion by shrinking the swollen lining of the nose. They should only be used by adults and for short periods of time, otherwise symptoms can reappear when their use is stopped. Examples include Vicks Sinex and Otrivine Nasal Spray.
- 3 Saline nasal sprays** – these are a drug-free way of relieving nasal congestion. Products containing natural sea water (e.g. Stérimar Nasal Hygiene) work by washing away allergens and rebalancing nasal functions. Some have additional ingredients such as manganese, calcium and purified water (e.g. Stérimar Stop & Protect Allergy Response) to deactivate allergens in the nose and form a barrier to prevent allergens from irritating the lining of the nose.



When to refer

You should refer a customer to the pharmacist if they:

- Have not had hayfever before
- Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Are taking other medication
- Also suffer from asthma
- Have unsuccessfully tried an OTC treatment or are suffering unacceptable side effects
- Report wheezing, breathlessness or a feeling of tightness in their chest
- Report sinus pain, headache, or a yellow/green nasal discharge.



SIGNPOSTING

For more information, see:

- The *Counter Intelligence Plus* training guide
- Allergy UK: www.allergyuk.org or call 01322 619898
- Action Against Allergy: www.actionagainstallergy.co.uk or call 020 8892 2711
- How to administer eye drops: www.webmd.com/eye-health/how-insert-eye-drops
- How to administer nasal sprays: www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/cold-guide/nasal-sprays-cold-relief.

TEST YOURSELF ONLINE

GOOD PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT WHEN ADVISING CUSTOMERS



Questions

1) Which of the following statements is **FALSE**?

- a) Hayfever is more common in boys than it is in girls
- b) Those with a family history of allergic conditions are more likely to suffer from hayfever
- c) Hayfever affects two in five people
- d) The number of older people suffering from hayfever for the first time is rising

2) Which of the following statements is **TRUE**?

- a) Pollen can trigger the immune system to release histamine
- b) Pollen is not the allergen that triggers hayfever
- c) Pollen counts are constant throughout the year
- d) Keeping windows open can help to ease symptoms

3) Which of the following is **NOT** recognised as a common symptom of hayfever?

- a) Sneezing
- b) Runny nose or nasal congestion
- c) Itchy eyes, ears, nose or mouth
- d) Migraines

4) Which of the following allergy sufferers does **NOT** need to be referred to the pharmacist?

- a) A six-year-old boy who has never suffered from hayfever before and is producing a yellow nasal discharge
- b) An asthmatic pregnant woman
- c) A middle-aged woman who suffers from nasal congestion during the summer months
- d) A teenager who is suffering unacceptable side effects from his OTC treatment

5) Which of the following statements is **FALSE**?

- a) Different types of pollen may not produce symptoms in every hayfever sufferer
- b) Grass pollen affects around 90 per cent of hayfever sufferers
- c) Tree pollen is released in spring
- d) Grass pollen is released at the end of autumn



Scenario

Wendy, 38, tells you that she suffers from hayfever every summer for several weeks. Her main symptoms include a blocked nose and sneezing. She wants to be well prepared and get her symptoms under control before the start of the hayfever season.

What would you recommend?

For each part of this scenario, select one option that you think would be most suitable for the customer and why. In addition, think about how you would talk to the customer and provide the necessary advice.

You can discuss this with your team and pharmacist.

1

A corticosteroid nasal spray because it will be effective against all of Wendy's symptoms and is useful for people who suffer from allergies each year for long periods of time. Can be used before the season starts.

2

Sodium cromoglicate eye drops because itchy eyes are one of Wendy's key symptoms.

What if?

Wendy tells you that she has a **nine-year-old son, Peter**, who also suffers from hayfever. She asks whether the corticosteroid nasal spray would be suitable for him.

1

Yes. Peter can use the same product.

2

No. Corticosteroid nasal sprays are not suitable for customers under the age of 18.

What if?

Wendy has asthma and reports wheezing and breathlessness.

1

Suggest some ways for Wendy to limit her exposure to pollen and recommend a barrier nasal spray.

2

Refer Wendy to the pharmacist for further advice.

3

Refer Wendy to a GP.



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