

Hay Fever

OR

Allergic Rhinitis

What Is It?

"Allergic Rhinitis" is the medical term for an irritation of the lining of the nose caused by an allergy. ("Allergic" = allergy, "rhin" = nose, and "itis" = irritation). When this problem occurs only during certain seasons, it is called seasonal allergic rhinitis or hay fever. When it occurs year-round, it is called perennial allergic rhinitis. Here we will just call it hay fever to make the reading easier.

Hay fever causes itching of the nose and eyes, and sometimes of the throat and inside the ears. Sneezing, sniffing, runny nose, and post nasal drip appear. The person with hay fever is often very uncomfortable.

What Causes It?

Like other allergies, hay fever is an abnormal reaction to a substance which causes no trouble for other people. No one knows why some people react while others do not, but we do know that allergies tend to run in families.

In the case of hay fever, pollen is the substance to which people react. In the case of year-round rhinitis, the problem is usually many substances, including pollen, dust, mold, mildew, and animals.

What Usually Happens With Hay Fever?

If the problem begins in childhood, most people (80%) will have it for the rest of their lives. Once it begins, hay fever tends to get worse each year until it reaches a certain level. It will then remain at that level throughout life unless

it is treated. The level it reaches depends on many factors and varies from person to person.

What Problems Can Occur?

These patients have more sore throats, ear infections, bad colds, and other respiratory infections than do other people have. Headaches, coughing, and infections can develop. There may be a loss of smell or taste. Fluid can build up in the ear and cause a problem called *serous otitis media* or middle ear irritation. Hearing loss can result. Many people with this problem become addicted to nose drops.

What Makes It Worse?

Being around the substances (allergens) to which you are allergic will always make it worse. Other things such as changes in the weather, sudden chilling, being around tobacco smoke or other fumes and odors, and breathing cold air can also make it worse.

What Can I Do To Help Myself Get Better?

Avoiding the allergens or things you are allergic to is the very best way to help yourself. When this is not possible, you should follow your doctor's advice about treatment and medication.

What Happens When It Is Treated?

When properly treated, the vast majority of people with hay fever will get relief. Proper treatment includes avoidance of the allergens, allergy shots, and medication.