

ah-ah-achoo!

Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, is the most common allergy in the UK, with one in five people suffering symptoms at some point in their lives. For millions, enjoyment of the warmer weather is blighted by the misery of constant sneezing or itchy eyes. Josephine Firth, a registered member of the Society of Homeopaths, looks at the condition, and suggests some solutions...

The hay fever season varies from individual to individual, depending on the substance to which they are allergic. Tree pollens, such as birch, arrive first, in spring, and are followed by grass pollens in summer and fungal spores in the autumn. However, increased traffic congestion is adding to the problem, with 'urban hay fever' now affecting up to 60% of city residents.

Hay fever is an allergy that is caused by a weakened immune system. The most common symptoms include itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, coughing, itchy throat and palate, sore throat, respiratory wheezing, runny or stuffed up nose. Symptoms can be uncomfortable, annoying and stressful, severely affecting quality of life. As the highest pollen levels tend to coincide with end of term exams the effects on students are particularly detrimental, with around 40% of sufferers likely to drop a grade in exams. This figure rises to an astonishing 70% for those students using sedating anti-histamines to address the problem.

Conventional treatments include topical steroids and anti-histamines, both of which work by suppressing the body's immune response to allergens. Generally they need to be taken daily and can cause a number of side effects, such as drowsiness.

Homeopathy is a safe, natural, holistic alternative, which can help sufferers in two ways. Firstly, carefully selected remedies can offer symptomatic relief, and are free from unwanted side effects. Secondly, an individual 'constitutional' treatment with a professional homeopath will work to strengthen the immune system, to prevent the problem returning in the future,



although it may take a number of seasons to eradicate completely.

A susceptibility to hay fever suggests a deeper underlying cause, so you may wish to consider having an individual treatment. In the short-term, though, the following remedies – available at health food stores, homeopathic pharmacies and most good chemists – may offer symptomatic relief. Choosing the remedy that most closely matches your individual symptom picture will offer the greatest benefit.

Allium Cepa 30c

Stinging, watery eyes (not burning);
Dripping nose with thin, burning discharge, causing sore nostrils & upper lip;
Violent sneezing;
Raw, hoarse throat & maybe tickly cough;
Symptoms are worse indoors and better for fresh air

Arsenicum Album 30c

Violent sneezing without relief;
Burning sensation in eyes, nose and throat;
Eyes red & swollen & sensitive to light;
Thin, watery nasal discharge;
All discharges may be acrid;
Symptoms are better indoors & better for warm applications (esp. eyes)

Euphrasia 30c

Eyes are severely affected: red, itchy and dry eyes, swollen lids, burning discharge;
Aversion to light;
Tickling cough, intense;
Sneezing, runny nose with bland discharge (NOT burning) during day (nose stopped up at night);
Symptoms worse indoors

Pulsatilla 30c

Bland yellow-green discharge from the nose & eyes;
Eyes itch and feel gritty;
Sneezing;
Sore, dry throat but no thirst;
Loss of smell & taste;
Symptoms worse in a stuffy room;
Better in open air

Sabadilla 30c

Bouts of violent sneezing, provokes tears;
Red, burning, watery eyes with swollen lids;
Constant, maddening tingling in nose, with desire to rub;
Hypersensitivity of smell, esp garlic & flowers;
Dry throat with soreness on swallowing;
Symptoms worse for cold air;
Better for open air & heat