

What is allergic rhinitis?

Hay fever is the common name for allergic rhinitis; rhino meaning "of the nose" and its meaning "inflammatory." Thus, allergic rhinitis is defined as an inflammation of the nose caused by allergies. Hay fever may be perennial, which means symptoms are present throughout the year, or seasonal, with symptoms present during the months of Spring and Summer only.

However, it is important to note that your nose is not the only body organ affected by this condition. Symptoms may also affect the eyes, sinuses, throat and ears.

The incidence of allergies in Australia has approximately doubled over the past few decades and statistics now predict 1 in 3 Australians will develop allergies at some time during their life! This shows you how important it is to understand allergies and what effect they have on your body.

Why do some people get allergies?

An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system treats a harmless substance as if it is dangerous. This means that the body will launch an attack, causing the nasal passages to become inflamed and produce excess amounts of mucus. These substances that the body reacts to are called "allergens" and it is important to note that only susceptible people will react to them.

So what are these allergens?

There are many different types of allergens. Some of the most common allergens include:

- Food (e.g. shellfish, peanuts, eggs, milk)
- Plants
- Insects (e.g. dust mites, venom from wasps, ticks and bees)
- Moulds
- Animal dander
- Medicines and chemicals (e.g. antibiotics, latex rubber)

Since allergic rhinitis mainly affects the nose, it is important to understand how the nose works and what it does for the body.....

The nose is a very important part of our body and provides 5 essential functions:

1. Provides an airway to assist us in breathing
2. Warms and moistens the air entering our body
3. Filters inspired air in order to cleanse it of foreign matter
4. Serves as a resonating chamber for speech
5. Houses our smell (olfactory) receptors

What are some common symptoms associated with allergic rhinitis?

As discussed previously, allergic rhinitis predominantly affects the nose; however, there are many other related symptoms that a patient may experience including:

- Sneezing
- Runny/blocked nose
- Blocked ears
- Itchy nose, eyes, ears and palate
- A sore throat, sometimes accompanied by a dry, irritating cough
- Headaches

How do you treat allergic rhinitis?

Your pharmacy stocks a wide range of treatments that may help to relieve the symptoms of allergic rhinitis (hay fever). It is important to remember all patients with a symptom-based request should speak to their pharmacist to ensure the most effective treatment strategy is used. The medications below are all available over-the-counter in your LiveLife pharmacy:

Oral Antihistamines

Antihistamines work in the body by blocking histamine from attaching to its histamine receptor; thus, reducing the inflammatory allergic responses such as sneezing and itching. These antihistamines are available in tablet and liquid forms and may be separated into two different categories:

- ***Sedating antihistamines***
 - These antihistamines are useful to aid sleep; however, care should be taken in patients with other medical conditions/on other medications.
 - Not suitable for "day-time" use
 - More "drying" for the nasal passages than the non-sedating alternatives.
 - E.g. Phenergan, Polaramine
- ***Non-sedating antihistamines***
 - Generally a better option for patients not wanting the "drowsy" effects of antihistamines.
 - Less likely to interact with other medications
 - Still a small possibility of drowsiness with some agents: i.e. Zyrtec
 - All agents similar in efficacy—patients should choose according to previous response and chance of sedation
 - E.g. Telfast, Zyrtec, Claratyne

Topical Antihistamines

These medications have the same mechanism of action as oral antihistamines; however, are used to target a more "localised" area (nose and eyes).

- Faster acting than oral antihistamines
- Examples of nasal sprays include azep and livostin
- Examples of eye drops include Visine allergy, Zaditen and EyeZep

Topical Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids work by reducing the body's immune inflammatory response to allergens. They may be used for both treatment and prevention. For prevention, the nasal spray is used at the start of the hay fever season. For treatment, a patient may need to use an additional decongestant or antihistamine initially, as relief may be delayed for a few days.

- Most effective over-the-counter treatment for hay fever—Please consult with your pharmacist if antihistamines/nasal sprays alone are not working as well as hoped.
- E.g. Beconase, rhinocort, telnase, nasonex

Decongestants

These may be in the form of oral tablets or nasal sprays/drops. Decongestants relieve sinus congestion and dry up a runny nose by constricting nasal blood vessels, thus reducing tissue swelling and congestion. It is important to note these agents will not have any effect on the allergic response itself; rather just providing symptom relief for the nose.

- E.g. Pharmacy Health Decongestant Nasal spray, Otrivin, Sudafed 12-hour relief tablets.

Is there a cure for allergies? What about Allergy Desensitisation/Immunotherapy?

This is a procedure available to some allergy sufferers, particularly those who have severe symptoms, those who do not get enough relief with typical medications and those that suffer with sensitivity to allergens that are hard to avoid (e.g. dust mites). This type of therapy involves a practitioner exposing the person to increasing amounts of an allergen over time in order to improve tolerance and reduce symptoms. The allergic response eventually gets "turned off" and the person becomes "immune" to the allergen.

Please note that this procedure is only conducted in doctor's surgery under direct medical supervision, as exposure to some allergens can be dangerous and potentially life threatening for some patients (e.g. patients who suffer anaphylaxis).

Some Treatment Options available at your LiveLife Pharmacy

Fexofenadine 180mg 10 pack

Active Ingredient(s): Fexofenadine 180mg

Directions for use: Take 1 tablet daily for relief of allergy symptoms.

Important points to remember:

- An alternative brand to TELFAST
- 24 hour relief
- For adults and children 12 years and over
- Provides fast non-drowsy relief of the symptoms of Hay fever:
- Sneezing
- Runny and itchy nose
- Itchy and water eyes
- Itchy throat
- Provides fast non-drowsy relief from itchy skin rash / hives
- Consult your pharmacist for children under 12 years of age and pregnant/breastfeeding women.

Loratadine 10mg 10 pack

Active Ingredient(s): Loratadine 10mg

Directions for use: Take 1 tablet daily for relief of allergy symptoms.

Important points to remember:

- An alternative brand to CLARATYNE
- 24 hour relief
- For adults and children 12 years and over
- Provides fast non-drowsy relief from:
- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Watery, itchy eyes
- Itchy rash
- Consult your pharmacist for children under 12 years of age and pregnant/breastfeeding women.

"Optimal Care" products available from your pharmacist

- Tissues—especially your handy pocket sized packs.
- Saline nasal spray/ irrigation kit—to clear and wash the sinuses. This will help the allergy sufferer to breathe more easily and have less congestion.
- Anti-histamine tablets to go with a new corticosteroid nasal spray—remember when you start on beconase/rhinocort etc, it may take a couple of days to “kick in,” so we recommend an antihistamine to use in the meantime.
- Self care fact card—that way you won’t forget all of the fabulous lifestyle advice your pharmacist has provided.
- Soap free body wash (e.g. Pinetarsol, QV, Dermaveen) - make sure you are not irritating your skin with soaps or other cleansers with artificial fragrances, colours etc!
- Vaporiser—humidifying the air helps patients to breathe and may ease coughing.
- Inhalant fluid containing menthol and eucalyptus—to clear the sinuses, thus improving breathing.
- Hypoallergenic skin care products / cosmetics—it is important to not only TREAT the allergy, but to look at all other lifestyle factors. You may not be aware that some cosmetics and skin care regimens may actually be making your condition worse!
- Vaseline—to smear in the nostrils (this may decrease the amount of pollen/allergens able to travel into the sinuses.
- Vitamin C is important for healthy immune system function and taking vitamin C may help to decrease histamine levels.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I avoid allergies? Are there some lifestyle hints that I should know?

Allergies have a significant impact on quality of life and are associated with other medical conditions. Severe allergic reactions can even be life threatening. Once you and your pharmacist have decided on a suitable treatment, it is definitely important to ALSO find out any other important information which may assist you in your recovery and protect you from further attack. Below is a list of some commonly asked questions about allergic rhinitis:

1. If I am allergic to an animal, will continuous exposure desensitise me to them?

No, continuous exposure will not decrease your allergy. Sensitivity may even worsen with ongoing exposure. A better option is to minimise exposure with the animal, or at least keep them out of the bedroom, wash them regularly and have hard flooring that will not collect allergens.

2. I suffer from allergies—if I eliminate wheat and milk from my diet, will that cure me?

No—diet plays only a minor role in most allergies. When a food allergy does actually occur, reactions are usually rapid in onset, severe and obvious (i.e. Anaphylaxis). Eliminating wheat and milk will only help your allergies if you are confirmed to be allergic to these particular foods.

3. I don't take antihistamines drugs, as I am frightened they will make me tired. Are there any that WON'T make me sleepy? Yes, loratadine and fexofenadine are both good non-drowsy options for patients needing allergy relief.

4. If I am expecting to come into contact with an allergen, is there anything I can do to prevent my reaction? Yes, by taking an antihistamine in advance/ using an intranasal steroid prior to exposure, your reaction will be minimised.

5. I suffer from allergies all year round. Is there anything I can do at home to try and reduce my symptoms? Yes, although there may not be a cure for your allergies, there are many lifestyle tips which may prevent/limit your symptoms. Some of these include:

- **Splashing the eyes with cold water to flush out any pollen/allergens**
- **Stay indoors on windy days and as much as possible in Spring**
- **Reduce your exposure to dust and dust mites, animals and animal dander.**
- **Be clever about the plants you have in your garden—choose plants that are pollinated by birds/insects, rather than plants that release seeds into the air.**
- **Limit your grass area at home—consider replacing with bricked/paved areas.**
- **Smear petroleum jelly (e.g. Vaseline) inside the nose to prevent pollen from irritating the lining of your nose.**
- **Vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth**
- **Consider using a de-humidifier to reduce the mould content in your home.**