

Allergy

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Many families recognize that their children suffer from itchy noses, sneezing, nasal congestion, and post-nasal drip. Mostly, parents are annoyed by the constant sniffing, tearing, rubbing, and agitation hay fever provokes.

Certain times of year hay fever{ XE "hay fever" } is an often mentioned but is more accurately described as allergic rhinitis{ XE "allergic rhinitis" } or allergic conjunctivitis{ XE "allergic conjunctivitis" }. Hay fever is not a fever following the exposure to hay. Hay fever is an allergic reaction occurring along your nasal passages or eyes. A reaction triggers the release of histamine{ XE "histamine" }. This chemical produces swelling, itching, and a mucous discharge. It is not always easy to determine the trigger for hay fever. A great deal of detective work might be necessary.

Although many parents believe hay fever is a problem during the Spring, it will depend on the child's reaction to pollen, dust, or specific allergy-producing foreign proteins. Any season or all seasons can produce the unwanted symptoms.

The allergies might not cause most of the severe symptoms, but produce an environment for the development of secondary infections like sinusitis, otitis media, or asthmatic bronchitis.

Treatment:

The most common type of oral medications include decongestants{ XE "decongestants" } and antihistamines. A decongestant should reduce the swelling sufficiently to allow easy air flow through the nose. Antihistamines block the release of histamine and reduce the itching, swelling, and dry the mucous discharge. I like to recommend a combined medication. For a few children side-effects from these drugs can be more annoying than the disease . Sleepiness, hyperactivity, or agitation can bother some, but these symptoms are often dose-related so you can lower the dose and still benefit from the medication. In other situations the side effects become less noticeable over a few days or a week. I do not like to prescribe these medications for small infants four months or younger.

Topical decongestant sprays or drops help reduce the redness in the eyes or the swelling in the nose. Afrin™{ XE "Afrin™" } or Neosynephrine™{ XE "Neosynephrine™" } are common brands used as nasal sprays. Visine™{ XE "Visine™" } is a common eye drop for irritated, itchy eyes. Afrin™ or Neosynephrine™ should not be used for more than few days, because a rebound effect will emerge, and the original swelling can reappear and become worse. Other nasal sprays and eye drops are available by prescription. These work by interfering with the allergic reaction.

Testing for allergies can be done by an allergist. I will be happy to discuss this with you. if you feel that your child suffers from symptoms that are not relieved by conservative treatment.

Last reviewed January 9, 2006