

Allergic Rhinitis (Hay Fever) - Fast Facts

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1. Allergic rhinitis (commonly known as hay fever) affects around 18% of people in Australia and New Zealand. Despite its common name, it is not caused by hay and does not result in fever. Allergic rhinitis is caused by the nose and/or eyes coming into contact with allergens in the environment such as pollens (grasses, weeds or trees), dust mites, moulds and animal dander (fur, hair or feathers).
2. Signs of allergic rhinitis include a runny/itchy or congested nose, sneezing, and itchy/watery eyes. Some of these symptoms may be similar to those caused by infections (such as colds and flu), however, allergy symptoms will often continue unless treated correctly.
3. Allergic rhinitis symptoms may vary from mild to severe. For people with severe symptoms, day to day function is often affected. Symptoms may occur in a particular season (usually due to grass or pollen), or all year round (usually due to dust mites, moulds or animal dander). Allergic rhinitis is not caused by food allergy.
4. If allergic rhinitis is left untreated, it can lead to complications including sleep disturbance, daytime tiredness, headaches, poor concentration, and recurrent ear or sinus infections. It is also linked to the development of asthma.
5. For people who also have asthma, better control of allergic rhinitis symptoms often results in better control of their asthma.
6. A pharmacist and/or doctor can recommend treatments for allergic rhinitis. These include non-sedating antihistamines (tablets, syrups, nasal sprays, eye drops), saline (salt water) nasal sprays and rinses, intranasal corticosteroid (INCS) sprays, or sprays containing a combination of INCS and antihistamine.
7. For people with severe allergic rhinitis, further assessment and allergy testing by a clinical immunology/allergy specialist may be required. If it is possible to confirm the allergen/s causing allergic rhinitis, then minimising exposure to these may reduce symptoms.
8. Allergen immunotherapy (AIT), also known as desensitisation, is a treatment offered to people with severe allergic rhinitis. It reduces the severity of symptoms and the need for regular medications and involves taking regular, gradually increasing amounts of allergen extracts by injections or sublingual (under the tongue) tablets, sprays or drops. This treatment is long-term (three to five years) and is usually initiated by a clinical immunology/allergy specialist.

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