

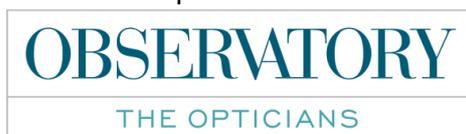
## Hayfever; solutions for your eyes

Hayfever is an allergy to pollen and is a very common condition affecting up to one in four people at some point in their life. The proper medical term is seasonal allergic rhinitis. Pollen is released by plants and can cause irritation and inflammation to the eyes, nose, throat and sinuses in many people. You can have an allergy to tree pollen which is generally released during spring; grass pollen at the end of spring and beginning of summer, or weed pollen from early spring to late autumn. The weather also affects the amount of pollen in the air. Typical symptoms include sneezing, a runny nose, blocked sinuses and sore or itchy eyes. Research suggests that pollution such as cigarette smoke or exhaust fumes can make allergies worse. You may be more likely to suffer from hayfever if you also have asthma or eczema as these conditions are related.

Over the counter treatments include anti-histamines and mast cell stabilisers. Eye drops containing anti-histamine such as azelastine will reduce the inflammation in your eyes which in turn will reduce the redness, itching and watering. Anti-histamines block the action of a protein called histamine which is released in response to an infection. Hayfever occurs when your body mistakes pollen for an infectious agent and tries to protect itself. The histamine is released from mast cells so a preventative measure for those who know they suffer from hayfever is to take a drug called a mast cell stabiliser for several weeks before the pollen appears, and this will prevent the histamine being released. The most common active ingredient in mast cell stabilisers is sodium cromoglicate.

Other things you can do to protect against the symptoms of hayfever is to avoid areas where pollen might be present such as grassy meadows or newly cut lawns and to keep windows closed both at home and in the car. Large wrap-around sunglasses can help protect your eyes against exposure to pollen and some people find that wearing contact lenses actually helps protect against the symptoms of hayfever. Talk to your optometrist about the best solution for you.

Joanna Williams B.Sc (Hons.) MCOptom  
Optometrist



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