

# Hooray! Spring Is Here

... but So Is Hay Fever

Spring is in the air, and so are billions of tiny pollens that trigger allergy symptoms in millions of people. This condition is called *seasonal allergic rhinitis*, commonly referred to as *hay fever*.

## What's the Problem with Pollen?

Hay fever is caused by pollen carried in the air, which starts a chain reaction in your immune system. Your immune system controls how your body defends itself. For instance, if you have an allergy to pollen, the immune system identifies pollen as an invader, or *allergen*. Your immune system overreacts by producing antibodies called *immunoglobulin E (IgE)*. These antibodies

- \* Stuffy nose (congestion)
- \* Runny nose
- \* Tearing eyes
- \* Dark circles under the eyes

**Know Your Sneezing Season** Depending on where you live, there are generally three pollen seasons. The start and end dates of these seasons, as well as the specific plants, vary based on the climate.

- \* Trees generally pollinate in the spring. Birch, cedar, cottonwood, and pine are big allergy triggers.
- \* Grass releases its pollen in the summer. Timothy, Johnson, and Rye grasses are examples of allergens in this category.

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travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction.

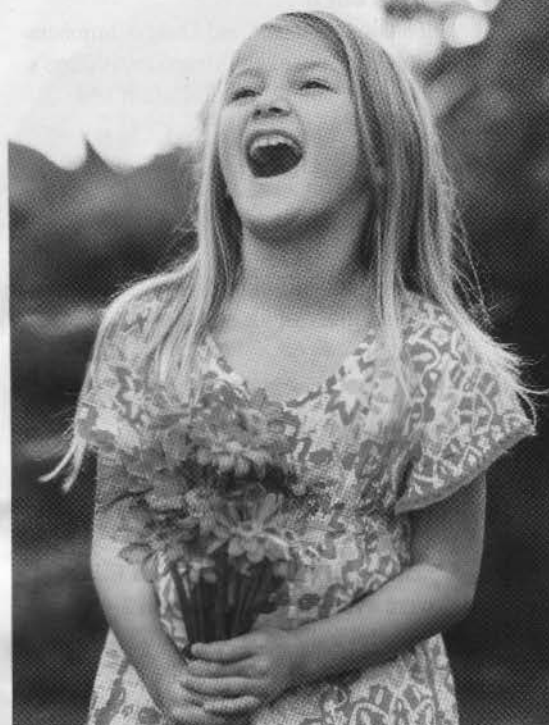
Hay fever can affect your quality of life. It can lead to sinus infections, disrupt your sleep, and affect your ability to learn at school or be productive at work. Hay fever symptoms include:

- \* Itchiness in your nose, throat, eyes, and ears, and on the roof of your mouth
- \* Sneezing

- \* Weeds cause hay fever in the fall. Ragweed is the biggest offender, as it can grow in nearly every environment.

## Take Control of Your Symptoms

Hay fever cannot be diagnosed by history alone. An allergist or immunologist can diagnose your allergies, and determine the specific triggers that cause them, through simple tests. Once your allergy triggers have been



identified, avoiding those triggers is the best way to reduce your hay fever symptoms. Here are a few simple steps you can take to limit your exposure to pollen:

- \* Limit outdoor activities during days with high pollen counts.
- \* Keep windows closed (at home and in the car) to keep pollen out.
- \* Take a shower after coming indoors for the day. Otherwise, pollen in your hair may bother you all night.

In addition to avoiding your triggers, your doctor may recommend medications for temporary relief. Hay fever medications work best if started before allergy symptoms develop. If you start taking allergy medication before you first come into contact with spring allergens, the medication can prevent the release of histamine and other chemicals. As a result, allergy symptoms are prevented from developing or are much less severe.

Allergy shots (*immunotherapy*) have been proven to provide long-term relief of hay fever symptoms. Ask your doctor if immunotherapy is something you should consider.

Learn more about managing spring allergies at [copingmag.com/seasonal\\_allergies](http://copingmag.com/seasonal_allergies).

Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, [aaaai.org](http://aaaai.org)

## Keep Your Hay Fever Symptoms in Check with Accurate Pollen Counts

Pollen counts are measured with an instrument that is usually situated on a rooftop where it collects spores for a 24-hour period. The instrument is then taken to a lab where the collected material is analyzed for pollen types and concentration. Pollen counts are reported for specific plants, such as trees, grasses, and weeds, and mold spores. Pollen counts are different from pollen

forecasts, which are predicted based on the previous year's pollen counts and current weather conditions.

To control hay fever symptoms, it is important to monitor pollen counts so you can limit your exposure on days the counts are high. You can keep track of pollen counts in your area by visiting the National Allergy Bureau's website, [aaaai.org/nab](http://aaaai.org/nab).