

# Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is commonly known as Hay fever; characterized by a heightened response of the immune system to “triggers” such as pollen grains and other allergens. Due to the allergic reaction to pollens or other triggers, the lining of the nasal cavity becomes inflamed causing primary symptoms such as runny nose and frequent sneezing.



In Australia, around 1 in 5 Australians (estimated 4.5 million individuals) experienced allergic rhinitis in 2015. Contrary to popular belief, hay does not cause allergic rhinitis and does not result in fever. Doctors may look for symptoms such as an itchy nose, runny nose, and itchy eyes.

Doctors advise those with allergic rhinitis to identify their specific triggers and reduce contact to those allergens as little as possible. Several medications can help such as antihistamines, decongestants, and steroids for severe cases.

## Causes

Nasal reaction to allergens prompts the symptoms of Allergic rhinitis. There are four (4) primary classes of allergens that may cause allergic rhinitis; these are the following :

- Pollens (spring and summer – trees, grass; fall – ragweed, tumbleweed)
- Insects (house dust mites, cockroaches, ladybugs)
- Animal allergens (skin, fur, feathers, saliva)
- Molds

Doctors determine the causes in each person based on when the symptoms appear like seasonality, or after exposures to certain triggers such as pets. For people with perpetual symptoms, it may be hard to identify the culprit allergen/s .

## **Manifestations**

Typical signs and symptoms of allergic rhinitis differ individually. While "rhinitis" is thought to only directed to a disorder of the nose, it also affects other organs such as eyes, throat, and ears. It can also disturb the sleep cycle as well. Manifestations are specified below :

- Nose – watery nasal emissions, clogged nose, frequent urge to sneeze, itchy nose, postnasal drip, loss of taste sensation, facial pain or pressure
- Eyes – itchy red eyes, eyebags
- Throats and ears – itchy and sore throat, itching and feeling full of the ears
- Sleep–shift to mouth breathing, insomnia, daytime fatigue

For recurrent or full-year allergic rhinitis, the primary manifestations are

- Post-nasal drip –is a condition where the nose produces a massive amount of mucus causes the mucus to move down the back of the throat, prompting repeated coughing.
- Persistent nasal congestion
- Insomnia

## **Diagnosis**

Your doctor will rely on physical examination, medical complaint, and history to diagnose your allergic rhinitis. The evaluation includes the symptoms and situations in which they happened, whether they occur throughout the year or just appeared during a specific season. Your doctor may also add allergy testing tests such as:

- Skin-prick test—a mixture of different allergens such as pollens, dust mites, insect venom, foods, and other triggers is positioned in the skin and then pricked with a needle.
- Allergen-specific immunoglobulin (IgE) test—a blood test that will look at your immunoglobulin E and determine if a specific allergen binds to your IgE.

## **Self-care and medical management**

The general management of allergic rhinitis aimed at minimizing or avoiding exposure to known environmental allergens and triggers, with or without medical therapy. Although, some people may require combination therapy. Self-care and management are enumerated below:

- Avoid exposure to allergens and triggers by:
  - Averting particular food that is known to be a trigger
  - The frequent vacuum of carpets and clean-up of the house
  - Replacing items that might accumulate dust
  - Avoiding pets such as dogs and cats
  - Replacing or stopping drugs that might cause allergy
  - Staying indoors during pollen season or wearing a mask

- Use of saline spray /saline solution
- VapoRub such as Vicks
- Some types of drugs may be prescribed by your doctor to control and prevent the symptoms of allergic rhinitis such as:
  - Antihistamines:
    - Although it may help relieve the symptoms of sneezing, runny nose and itchy eyes they may not be effective in treating your nasal congestion. Some forms may cause side effects such as drowsiness, so it is best to discuss with your doctor the time to take antihistamines
  - Corticosteroids (Steroids)
    - Nasal sprays containing steroids are the primary line of treatments your doctor may order to control your allergic rhinitis. Some people may immediately feel the relief after using corticosteroid spray for the first time, while it may take time for others to feel the effect of the drug
  - Decongestants
    - Decongestants can provide fast relief from the clogged nose and may be used in combination with antihistamines or corticosteroid sprays. However, doctors discourages giving decongestants to young childer ages 0-6 years old. It can also disrupt your sleep and may cause irritability. It is contraindicated to patients with heart ailments and elevated blood pressure.
  - Immunotherapy
    - Is a medical treatment wherein your doctor asks you to place a daily pill under your tongue. It may last for weeks or longer such as several months depending on the severity of your allergic rhinitis.