

Get set to beat hay fever!

Our week-by-week guide is packed with the latest advice on how you can banish the symptoms this spring

WEEK 1

Supercharge your diet

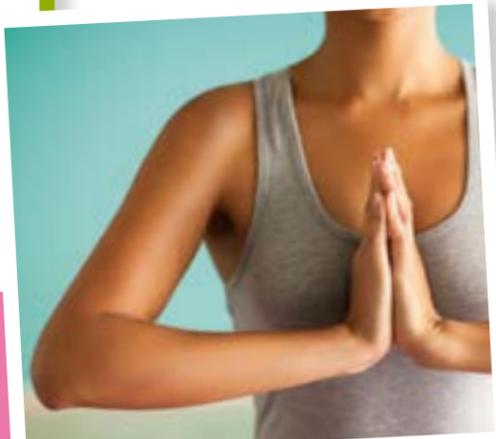
'Onions and apples are full of the antioxidant quercetin, a natural antihistamine that will reduce itchy, sneezy symptoms when you come into contact with pollen,' says nutritionist Judy Watson (judywatsonnutritionist.co.uk). 'Add in a vitamin C supplement and keep taking it right through to the end of the September as it will help to further break the histamine down.' Try Vitamin C with Bioflavonoids (£11.95 for 320 tablets from healthspan.co.uk).



WEEK 2

Nose out the right treatment

If you know you always suffer during the grass pollen season (which starts in late May), get started on nasal steroid treatment before the end of April, says Amena Warner, Nurse Advisor at Allergy UK. 'There are a number of different sprays available over the counter (eg, Flixonase) or on prescription (Avamys and Nasonex) and they should help prevent the full range of hay fever symptoms.'



explains Professor Jean Emberlin, Director of Allergy UK. 'Anything that helps you relax – whether that's dancing, singing, yoga or meditation – can help reduce the effects of cortisol and how your body responds to allergens.'

WEEK 3

Keep calm

Rest and relaxation can make all the difference to symptoms – while stress can make them much worse, according to an Ohio University study. 'The stress hormone cortisol affects the immune system, so it is less able to cope with allergens like pollen – leaving you more bunged up, teary and sneezy as a result,'

WEEK 4

Get cleaning!

There's a lot you can do in your home to keep pollen at bay.

- ◆ Wash bed linen at 50-60 degrees and avoid drying it outside when pollen levels peak in the mornings and evenings.
- ◆ You'll find a host of clinically proven and recommended anti-allergy vacuum cleaners, air purifiers and cleaning products on the Allergy UK website (allergyuk.org).
- ◆ Have a shower or bath before bedtime to remove any pollen that's built up during the day.
- ◆ Experts also recommend cleaning pollen particles from your nasal passages once or twice a day with a saline nasal rinse (eg, Sterimar Sea Water Nasal Spray, £6.49, Boots). Professor Emberlin says, 'I also like Boots Allergy Barrier – a spray which coats the nasal passages with a cellulose gel to prevent pollen from getting in.'

WEEK 5

Ban the booze

'Alcohol suppresses your immune system, making it harder for your body to fight an allergy,' warns Professor Emberlin. Red wine is the worst culprit as it's also naturally high in histamine. But even low-histamine alcoholic drinks, such as whisky, will have an impact.



WEEK 6

Save cash at the chemist

If you still get symptoms – from a sneezy, streaming or blocked nose to itchy eyes and throat – antihistamines (such as loratadine or cetirizine) can be taken in addition to your steroid nasal sprays. Ask for them by these generic names at the pharmacy counter – they're a fraction of the price of a branded product.

DID YOU KNOW?

'Students are 40-70% more likely to fail an exam when they're suffering with hay fever,' says Amena Warner of Allergy UK.

TREATMENTS...

If over-the-counter products aren't working for you, see your GP. They can prescribe stronger 'third generation' antihistamines – for example, NeoClarityn (a trade name for desloratadine). Some sufferers may be referred for immunotherapy, which retrains your body's response to pollen by taking increasing doses of allergen extracts. 'It's too late for it to prevent symptoms this year, but you could start a course in the autumn,' explains Amena.

WHEN DO POLLEN LEVELS PEAK?

Over 30 different pollens and fungi cause symptoms from January to October – here are the most common:

- ◆ **TREE POLLEN:** late March to mid-May.
- ◆ **BIRCH POLLEN:** from March (affects 25% of hay fever sufferers)
- ◆ **RAGWEED POLLEN:** Late June to September (affects 20% of sufferers)
- ◆ **OAK POLLEN:** May (affects around 20%)
- ◆ **GRASS POLLEN:** May to July (affects 95%).

