



Pollen and hay fever

Allergic rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever, is when someone has an allergy to pollen.

Windborne plant pollen is a well-known trigger for seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and seasonal allergic conjunctivitis. This pollen can blow into your nose and eyes, triggering asthma and allergies.

About 1 in 5 Australians and New Zealanders have allergic rhinitis. Up to 4 out of 5 people with asthma also have allergies like hay fever – either at certain times of the year or all year round.

Pollen can trigger

Allergy symptoms:

- itchy, watery eyes
- runny nose
- skin irritation
- sneezing.

Asthma symptoms:

- cough
- wheeze
- chest tightness
- shortness of breath.

High allergen plants

The types of pollen that trigger hay fever usually come from imported grasses, weeds and trees, which are wind pollinated. This means that these plants use the wind to carry pollen from plant to plant. Australian native plants are typically low allergen plants, although there are exceptions, such as cypress pine.

Allergies are not usually triggered by highly flowered plants, because the pollen in these plants is carried by birds or insects and not the wind.



Thunderstorm asthma

'Thunderstorm asthma' is a potent mix of pollens, weather conditions and rain that can trigger severe asthma symptoms.

When rain droplets crash into airborne pollen, the pollen grains are broken into tiny particles. These particles can then get further and deeper inside your lungs than the larger pollen grains and can trigger more severe asthma symptoms.



**Scan for more information about
thunderstorm asthma**

What you can do

Avoiding pollen

Completely avoiding pollen can be difficult during the pollen season but the following steps may help reduce your exposure.

Pollen forecast and information

- Check the pollen forecast in your area. Be prepared and plan ahead.

Medication

- Take prescribed medications as directed and ensure you have regular asthma and allergy reviews.
- Allergy testing can help identify specific triggers, along with recording when and where symptoms are experienced.
- In addition to prescription medicines, there are a number of over-the-counter products that may alleviate symptoms.



Getting out and about

- Use your prescribed medications (like your asthma preventer) before going outdoors when pollen cannot be avoided. Keep your asthma action plan and asthma reliever with you.
- Try to avoid going outdoors on days with high or extreme pollen counts, on windy days or after thunderstorms.
- Use re-circulated air in the car when pollen levels are high or extreme.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Wear a facemask in special situations where you can't avoid lots of pollen, e.g. when driving a tractor during harvest.
- Keep windows closed when in your car, ensure your car cabin air filtration (and the filter is periodically changed) and/or use recirculating air conditioning in your car.
- Avoid picnics in the park or country areas and try to plan your holidays out of the pollen season or holiday at the beach.

In your garden

- Do not mow the grass yourself and stay inside when it is being mown. If mowing is unavoidable, wear a mask or consider taking a non-drowsy antihistamine if your doctor has suggested this.
- Consider planting a low allergen garden with plants pollinated by birds or insects as these are less likely to trigger allergic rhinitis or asthma.
- If you are sensitive to particular weeds or trees remove them.

Important reminder

Remember, an itchy, runny or blocked nose due to allergies can make your asthma harder to control. Speak with your doctor or pharmacist for assistance with managing your allergies, asthma, or hay fever.



In your home

- Keep windows closed.
- Avoid drying laundry on an outside clothesline on high or extreme pollen count days.
- Indoor plants tend to not be the source of pollen but may trigger symptoms because of mould growth or fragrances.
- Shower (and wash clothes that have been exposed to the elements) when you arrive home and rinse your eyes frequently with water.
- If you still experience symptoms indoors, an air purifier may help.

Download asthma action plans



Download an allergy action plan



Disclaimer: It is important to note that information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.