

# Hay fever – the misery season

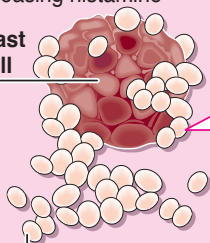
Up to 20 per cent of the population suffers from hay fever at some time in their lives. A huge increase in cases in urban rather than rural areas suggests that exhaust fumes may be as guilty as the traditional villains, grass and tree – specifically birch – pollen

**1** Pollen, nitrogen dioxide or photochemical smog invade body through nose, eyes and lungs

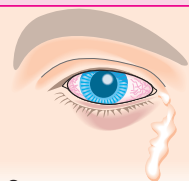


**2** Mast cells in the skin attack the invaders by releasing histamine

**Mast cell**



**Histamine granules**

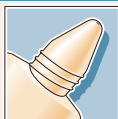


**3** Histamine inflames tissues in the allergy-prone; respiratory muscles contract making breathing difficult

## Treatments and precautions



**Decongestants:** standard cold and flu remedies not recommended as they soon irritate the nose



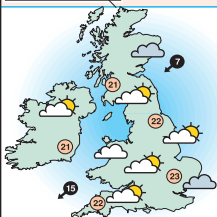
**Sprays:** anti-allergic sprays similar to those for asthma can help contain symptoms



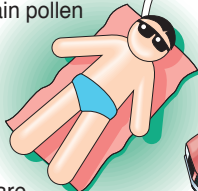
**Injections:** resistance built up gradually by injecting allergen, allowing immune system to produce antibodies to fight irritant



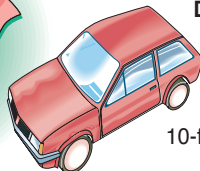
**Antihistamine:** chemical blocking of mast cell receptors prevents histamine being released – most common treatment



**Grass, clothes:** Keep off the grass. Wash hair and clothes frequently as both retain pollen



**Sunglasses:** wear sunglasses to protect the eyes and avoid rubbing eyes and nose before washing hands



**Doors, windows:** Keep them shut. Driving with open windows means encountering a 10-fold dose of pollen

**Forecasts:** Listen to daily pollen forecast. Early morning, when pollen is released, and evening, when it settles, are the worst time for sufferers