

### Hay Fever

The weather has warmed, the fields are green, the plants are flowering and the pollen that comes along with all of this is wrecking havoc for many people.

Hay fever, also known as allergies or as the medical term “allergic rhinitis,” can be caused by the pollen of some seasonal plants, dusts, animal dander and molds that pass through the air. The worst of hay fever occurs from late May through June. Most people who are affected by hay fever have a runny nose, congestion, itching, sneezing and feel pressure in their sinuses.

Not every person is affected by pollen or the other chemicals that cause hay fever. In fact, it is impossible to have allergies to a certain type of pollen or chemical the first time you are exposed to it. As with other allergies, it takes a second exposure to cause symptoms.

Here is what happens in the body: a microscopic pollen particle is floating through the air and is breathed into your nose. The immune system in the body finds this pollen and recognizes that it is not from the body—it is an intruder. The body then makes an antibody to this pollen, which means it can specifically recognize it and will be ready to attack the next time.

The next time the pollen enters the body, the antibody will attach to it, and then the immune system will be set off, which leads to the runny nose, itching and sneezing. This response is meant to be aimed at bacteria and other intruders to the body.

Reacting to the pollen is essentially an overly aggressive immune system. Not all bodies react in this way, which is why not every person has these reactions.

So, if not everyone gets allergies like this, who does? Those with a family history of hay fever are more likely to have it. People born during the hay fever season, those who are bottle fed (with formula and not breast milk), those who had antibiotic treatment at a very young age and those whose mothers smoked during the first year of their life are all people whose risk of developing hay fever are greater.

Up to 40 percent of children and 30 percent of adults have some form of hay fever. This common illness has a number of different treatments, the first of which is to try to avoid the pollens that set the symptoms off. Closed windows and air that is filtered through the air conditioner will limit the pollens in the house during the hay fever season.

Doctors can prescribe a spray for the nose that can help calm down the symptoms. Antihistamine medications can also be helpful and some are available without a prescription.

Some people will not need to take medications, while others will have symptoms that make them miserable, and they may be better off with the use of a medication during the weeks when pollen is at its worst.

☐☐ ☐ *Justin Newman is originally from Holyoke and is attending medical school at the University Of Chicago Pritzker School Of Medicine.*

☐☐ ☐ *This column is about health related issues with a focus on a rural community. The purpose of this column is to be informative and to comment on interesting medical and health related topics. Any questions or concerns that may arise regarding topics covered by this article should be addressed to your primary care doctor. ☐*

☐☐ ☐ *Justin can be reached by email at Justin.Tyler.Newman@gmail.com with comments or ideas for topics that you may desire to be addressed in this column. The goal of this column is that you find it not only entertaining and informative but also that it creates a desire to take a life-long interest your health and body.*