

Help your eyes survive the hay fever season

Hay Fever



THE COLLEGE
OF OPTOMETRISTS

With the arrival of the warm weather comes another less welcome summer staple - hay fever. Hay fever, or seasonal allergic rhinitis, is an allergic reaction caused by pollen. Eye experts at The College of Optometrists have issued some top tips on avoiding 'hay fever eyes' for the one in four Britons* who suffer each summer.

The most common symptoms of hay fever are itchy eyes and nose, sneezing, runny or blocked nose and difficulty in breathing. Exposure to pollen may also set off an allergic reaction in the eyes as the conjunctiva, the delicate membrane which covers the white of the eye and inside of the eyelids, becomes inflamed and leaves the eyes swollen and weepy. Some people also experience a gritty feeling in their eyes, and dust and city pollution may exacerbate the problem.

People who wear contact lenses may find that their eyes become very irritated. This may result in the need to remove them, or only wear them in the evenings when the pollen count is lower.

The best solution for hay fever sufferers is to avoid pollen as much as possible by closing windows and keeping surfaces clear with a damp duster. However, it is not always practical to avoid pollen altogether, particularly when you're out and about, or if you work outdoors.

Dr Susan Blakeney from the College of Optometrists, says: "Hay fever quite often affects the eyes. Eyes can become very red, itchy and swollen - and can make the summertime a real misery for a lot of people. While trying to avoid pollen as much as possible will help lessen the symptoms, sufferers can also visit their pharmacist to get medicated eye drops to help alleviate the itching and swelling. However, if you are a contact lens wearer you must ask for advice on whether you can use your eye drops while your lenses are in - many solutions must not be inserted into the eye if contact lenses are being worn at the time."

If your eyes are red, blurry, sore, or uncomfortable this may be due to hay fever. If you have any doubts consult your optometrist for advice. Dr Blakeney offers the following tips to help ease the discomfort of 'hay fever eyes':

- Avoid pollen as much as possible by closing windows and keeping surfaces clear with a damp duster.
- Wear sunglasses which may help to protect your eyes from dust and pollen.
- Visit your pharmacist to get medicated eye drops to help alleviate the itching and swelling. If you wear contact lenses remember to check if you can use the drops while your lenses are in.
- When the pollen count is very high it can be more comfortable wearing your spectacles rather than your contact lenses.

- The level of pollen is usually lower in the evenings so you may find the symptoms ease during that time of the day.
- You may feel more comfortable by avoiding wearing contact lenses in hot, dry or dusty conditions or when you are gardening, particularly when mowing the lawn, as grass particles, pollen etc. can become stuck behind the lens and cause discomfort.
- If your eyes become dry, seek professional advice from your optometrist or GP. They may prescribe lubricating eye drops to ease the dryness.
- If you have any concerns about your eyes, consult your optometrist who is the eye specialist on the high street.

*Source: www.nhs.uk