Does hay fever affect your quality of life?

Immunotherapy may be the answer
If your hay fever (allergic rhinitis) is causing you misery, and you’re not seeing improvements in your symptoms despite trying various treatments and medications, you could benefit from immunotherapy.
Severe hay fever

Allergic rhinitis is the medical term for the symptoms of hay fever.

The condition affects approximately 20% of the UK population.

Many people perceive allergic rhinitis as a relatively trivial condition, but studies have shown that it can have a serious impact on quality of life. Allergic rhinitis occurs when the body's immune response overreacts to allergen sources such as pollen, house dust mite, mould or animal dander (hair, saliva, skin flakes). These are known as airborne allergens, as they are carried in the air we breathe and affect the nose, and sometimes the lungs as well.

Rhinitis is inflammation of the nasal lining. Symptoms can include sneezing, runny/blocked nose, itching and mucous dripping down the back of the throat. It can also affect the eyes and sinuses. If you find that your symptoms are only affecting you during the summer months, it may be that you are reacting to pollens from trees, grasses or weeds. This is known as seasonal allergic rhinitis. If you have symptoms all year round, this is known as persistent or perennial rhinitis, which can be caused by allergens such as house dust mite, mould or animal dander.

Symptoms vary from person to person. It could be that you experience a mild sniffle during the summer months or you may have more severe symptoms, such as an extremely runny nose, constant sneezing, sore inflamed, itching eyes and chronic nasal congestion. It is important to treat your symptoms, as those who suffer from allergic rhinitis are at an increased risk of developing asthma, if the condition is not well-treated and properly managed.
Allergy testing

Immunotherapy (also known as desensitisation) can only be carried out once your allergy has been diagnosed. To get a diagnosis, you will have to undergo allergy testing. So if your allergic rhinitis has not yet been confirmed, you are advised to discuss allergy testing with your GP. After diagnosis your GP may suggest a referral to an allergy specialist who carries out desensitisation/immunotherapy. Only validated tests, such skin prick testing or a blood test called Specific IgE, should be used. Alternative practitioners may offer other tests but these are NOT RECOMMENDED.
What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is a well-established treatment for certain severe allergic conditions where symptoms cannot be controlled. Immunotherapy is most commonly used to treat severe allergic rhinitis, although the treatment is also available for life-threatening (anaphylactic) reactions to wasp and bee venom. It has been shown to reduce severe symptoms and improve quality of life.

Allergic rhinitis is usually treated with antihistamines, nasal steroid sprays, anti-allergy eye drops and other ‘add on’ medication available from your doctor. Whilst these medications can be extremely effective, for some people the symptoms are so severe that these types of medications do not control them effectively. In these cases immunotherapy may be considered. Immunotherapy is a way of reprogramming your immune system to stop adversely reacting to an allergen.

Immunotherapy can be given in different ways. It can be administered through an injection of the purified allergen extract into the skin (usually in the upper arm), or it can be given orally (in the mouth) also known as sublingual, either in drops or tablet form, placed under the tongue.

Injections can only be carried out in specialist centres within hospitals, and by highly experienced staff, so that any side effects can be monitored and promptly treated. However, with oral immunotherapy only the first dose needs to be administered in hospital and the rest of the treatment can be self-administered at home. As the treatment progresses, the dose of allergen is gradually increased until the allergic individual can tolerate exposure to the allergen without developing major symptoms. There is also a short course injection regime, which is administered prior to the start of the hay fever season and is a very popular treatment option.

Immunotherapy is given over three consecutive years and, for the best results, it is essential that the entire course is completed. Individual responses can vary, so the treatment will be tailored to each person.
Severe allergic rhinitis questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed by Allergy UK to indicate whether your allergic rhinitis is adequately controlled by medication and, if not, whether you should seek further advice from your GP regarding referral for immunotherapy. Simply answer YES or NO and see what your answers may indicate at the end of the questionnaire.

1. Do you suffer from a blocked nose/runny nose/sore throat/catarrh/sneezing when you don’t have a cold?

2. Would you say that itchy/inflamed eyes/itchy ears/itchy palate is a problem for you?

3. If you suffer with any of the above symptoms, have you had treatment from a doctor/nurse or pharmacist?

4. Has your allergy been confirmed with an allergy test by your GP or a Consultant?

5. Have you experienced the above symptoms despite taking your medications regularly? (i.e. antihistamines/nasal sprays/combination nasal sprays (antihistamine and steroid/eye drops).

6. At certain times of the year do your symptoms seem worse?

7. Do you find that your symptoms affect your quality of life e.g. sleeping/school/work/exercise?

Find out what do your answers mean overleaf
What do your answers mean?

**Mostly ‘Yes’**
Your symptoms may not be as well controlled as they could be. If you have not yet been medically diagnosed, you should see your GP to discuss the options available for allergy testing and effective management. If you are already being treated by your doctor, and your symptoms are not being well controlled, you can ask to be referred to an allergy clinic for an assessment to find out if you are a suitable candidate for immunotherapy. We suggest you take this questionnaire with you so your doctor is aware of your answers.

**Mostly ‘No’**
Your symptoms seem to be currently under control. However, if they get worse, make an appointment to see your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.

For more information please contact Allergy UK on 01322 619898 or visit our website: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

Our Helpline Advisors can signpost you to your nearest allergy clinic where immunotherapy is available. You can discuss with your GP whether you need a referral.

1. Royal College of Physicians 2003 Report Allergy the Unmet Need.
3. Management of allergic rhinitis and its impact on asthma (ARIA) 2007
Allergy Therapeutics is a British-based specialty pharmaceutical company focused on the treatment and prevention of allergy. Allergy Therapeutics has a long-term commitment to the research and development of innovative therapies for allergy-related conditions.

Allergy UK is the leading national patient charity for people living with allergic disease. Its mission is to improve the lives of people living with allergy. Through its Helpline and a wide range of free information and factsheets available on the website, it provides help and advice about all kinds of allergy.