

Avoid hay fever misery this spring

By Dr Paul Williams, West Norfolk CCG's Governing Body member responsible for Prescribing and Education and the CCG's prescribing team.

Spring is in the air and with this comes misery for a lot of us. The sight of rape flowers in the field, blossom on the trees and the sound of the lawn mower means the hay fever season is upon us. Hay fever is an allergic condition where the body overacts to usually harmless substances such as pollen produced by plants and trees. This common condition affects around 1 in 5 of us, causing sneezing, a blocked and runny nose, itchy throat and red, itchy or watery eyes.

The severity of symptoms can vary and a lot of us need medication to manage our symptoms. West Norfolk spends over £200,000 per year on medications for hay fever which could be purchased rather than prescribed. A wide range of medication can be purchased from community pharmacies, supermarkets and general stores for as little as £1. Many people already choose to obtain their treatments themselves and the common medications are usually cheaper than a prescription from your GP. Your local community pharmacist can advise you on the best treatment for your symptoms; many pharmacies are open 7 days a week and the pharmacist is always available so there is no need to wait for an appointment with your GP.

Treatments available to purchase include antihistamine tablets and syrup, antihistamine and steroid nasal sprays, eye drops, decongestants (be careful not to over use these) and simple pain relief. Taking steps to reduce your exposure to pollen and other triggers is sensible; keep windows closed (especially in cars), avoid grassy and woodland areas when the pollen count is high. Wearing wraparound sunglasses and using petroleum jelly around your nostrils to prevent pollen entering your nose may help to reduce eye and nasal symptoms. Also, avoid drying washing outside to prevent pollen sticking to your clothes if you are particularly badly affected.

Many West Norfolk GPs are currently promoting a self-care campaign and will be encouraging you to take back the responsibility for managing your simple mild medical problems including hay fever. By taking the simple measures outlined here to help reduce exposure to pollen and by purchasing these inexpensive self-care treatments you can help to ensure NHS resources are used appropriately. Not only will this release financial resources for treating more complex conditions, it will also free up GP appointments for patients who need them most and reduce the waiting time to get an appointment.

If you experience breathing difficulties or tightness in your chest with your hay fever you will need to see your GP. If you are pregnant and breastfeeding your medication will need to be prescribed by your GP.