Hay Fever

Hay fever is an allergic condition triggered by inhalant substances (frequently pollens), which leads to sneezing and inflammation of the nose and conjunctiva of the eyes.

**Dietary therapies that may be helpful:** People with inhalant allergies are likely to also have food allergies. A hypoallergenic diet has been reported to help people with asthma and allergic rhinitis, but the effect of such a diet on hay fever symptoms has not been studied. People with hay fever interested in exploring the possible effects of a food allergy avoidance program should talk with a nutritionally oriented doctor. Discovering and eliminating offending food allergens is likely to improve overall health even if such an approach were to have no effect on hay fever symptoms.

**Nutritional supplements that may be helpful:** Vitamin C has antihistamine activity. However, although vitamin C supplementation has been reported to help people with hay fever in preliminary research, 2,000 mg of vitamin C per day did not reduce hay fever symptoms in a placebo controlled trial. Thus while some nutritionally oriented doctors recommend that hay fever sufferers take 1,000–3,000 mg of vitamin C per day, supportive evidence remains weak.

In theory, bioflavonoids such as quercetin, might act synergistically with vitamin C as both have antihistaminic
activity. Although some doctors of natural medicine advise people with hay fever to take 400 mg of quercetin two to three times per day, only limited preliminary clinical research has yet suggested that quercetin benefits people with this condition.7

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual supplement for information about any side effects or interactions.

**Herbs that may be helpful:** Nettle leaf led to a slight reduction in symptoms of hay fever—including sneezing and itchy eyes—according to an isolated double blind study.8 No other research has investigated this relationship. For help with hay fever symptoms, some herbally oriented doctors suggest taking 450 mg of nettle leaf capsules or tablets two to three times per day, or a 2–4 ml tincture, three times per day.

*Ephedra sinica* (Ma huang) is a standard remedy for hay fever in traditional medicine.9 Synthetic ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are popular over-the-counter drugs used for hay fever based on this tradition; however, whole ephedra appears to be safer than these isolated compounds.10 Capsules of ephedra providing 20 mg of ephedrine per day are sometimes recommended by doctors of natural medicine.

In traditional medicine, some herbs whose pollen can cause symptoms of hay fever have been used as a way to reduce symptoms of hay fever. The most important of these are
goldenrod and ragweed (*Ambrosia ambrosioides*), though eyebright and elder also have a reputation for use as hay fever remedies. However, an individual allergic to one of these plants should avoid them unless under the care of a doctor of natural medicine. None of these herbs has been scientifically evaluated for effects in treating people with hay fever.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual herb for information about any side effects or interactions.

**References:**

3. Ogle KA, Bullock JD. Children with allergic rhinitis and/or bronchial asthma treated with elimination diet. *Ann Allergy* 1977;39:8–11.