

Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Jul 08, 2020

Hay fever: avoiding pollen and mould

If you have hay fever, it's a good idea to avoid pollen and mould as much as you can. There are things you can do when the chances of getting hay fever symptoms are high. You may not be able to completely avoid these allergens, but the following steps may help.

If you're allergic to pollen:

- check the pollen forecasts every day. You may be able to find the pollen count online. For example, in the UK this information is available on the Met Office website (metoffice.gov.uk)
- when the pollen count is high, stay indoors as much as you can and keep your windows closed. Bear in mind that pollen levels are often highest in the early morning, between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.
- if possible, don't go outside at all if your symptoms are really bad. If you must go out, stay outside for as little time as possible
- don't dry your clothes outdoors. Pollen in the air may stick to your clothes
- keep pollen away from your eyes by wearing sunglasses that fit close to your eyes
- when you're in a car, keep the windows closed and use air conditioning if you have it. Some cars have pollen filters
- consider trying HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters in your home
- if you've been outside for a while, take a shower to wash the pollen off your skin
- avoid air pollution, tobacco smoke, and other irritants such as insect sprays, fresh paint, and tar. They may make your hay fever symptoms worse.

If you're allergic to mould:

- avoid places where mould grows, such as moist, shady areas and compost piles
- try to keep your home dry inside. Check for causes of damp, and consider using a dehumidifier
- check your home for mould damage. Small areas of mould can be removed with diluted bleach. But larger areas might require replacing the affected surface or material. Repainting problem walls and ceilings with antifungal paint is another option

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- don't cut the grass or rake leaves - and don't be in the garden when someone else is doing these things.

Some people's symptoms are also affected by dust mites. Measures to reduce problems with dust mites include:

- encasing mattresses, pillows, and quilts/duvets in impermeable covers
- washing all bedding weekly
- using HEPA filters
- using a dehumidifier, and
- using chemical treatments called acaricides on carpets and upholstery to control dust mites. You might even want to think about removing carpets in favour of non-fabric flooring, such as wood or tiles.

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