The Impact of Hay Fever - a survey by Allergy UK

PART 1

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During the past 60-70 years, the frequency of allergic diseases, such as eczema, asthma and rhinitis (which includes hay fever) has increased in westernised countries including the UK. This ‘atopic’ tendency is a risk factor for developing the ‘Allergic March’, which is the progression of allergy in childhood to adulthood (eczema, food allergy, asthma, hay fever).

Hay fever (the medical term is seasonal allergic rhinitis) is a very common condition and often underestimated, although those that suffer severely know that the symptoms can be extremely debilitating.

Hay fever can affect anyone at any time, from the very young to the very old. All can have symptoms that impact on their quality of life. Hay fever symptoms, if not kept under control have been shown to impact adolescents’ school work. The nature of allergic rhinitis can lead to loss of sleep and reduced concentration levels. Research has shown that the condition has affected exam performance.

The role of Allergy UK, is to support the needs and concerns of those with allergies and intolerances. We have a helpline with trained advisors and a website (www.allergyuk.org) with over 130 fact sheets, which are free to download and cover topics including hay fever and allergic rhinitis. With allergy on the increase, our overall objective is to be the voice and advocate of allergy sufferers. We offer help, support and advice and take the lead on initiatives that will help develop services for the allergic community.
Allergic Rhinitis is the medical term used for inflammation of the lining of the nose caused by allergens. The symptoms are itching, sneezing, nasal discharge (in hay fever this is usually clear runny fluid) and blockage or congestion in the nose. The nasal fluid can run down the back of the throat giving the sufferer an unpleasant sensation called post nasal drip. It frequently affects the eyes via the nose, causing itching, watering and redness.

It is very important to treat these symptoms and there are a variety of things that can help. Preparing for the pollen season well in advance is key, so that you start treating symptoms before they become severe, otherwise it may be more difficult to treat and require more or stronger medication to bring it under control.

This is where a simple nasal allergen barrier balm may be effective in some people. It is a drug free product which coats the entrance of each nostril with the balm, to which the allergen particles stick before entering the nose. With less allergen being breathed in via the nostrils, symptoms of rhinitis may be reduced. When the pollen count is very high or symptoms are severe, other medication may also be required and you should ask your pharmacist for advice. If your symptoms remain severe after these simple strategies, then you should visit your GP for further help or, if they remain severe despite maximum treatment, ask your GP for a referral to an allergist.
Research Overview

The research was carried out in two parts during the spring and summer months of 2015. Part 1 was to investigate the impact that hay fever has on the daily life of respondents, and part 2 was to find out whether HayMax allergen barrier balms effectively reduced their symptoms. This is a follow up survey from the one we conducted in 2014. 646 sufferers took part in the first questionnaire based survey ‘Hay fever and airborne allergy’. 538 (83%) answered the questions for themselves and 108 (17%) answered the questions for their child.

Which Region do you live in?

Geographical regions in the UK and Ireland were sectioned and 41% of the responders came from either London or the South East of England. This again was probably due to the cohort on the database and not reflective of the true countrywide incidence but gives an indication of where the majority who answered this survey lived in the UK.

What age is the sufferer?

As you can see from the pie chart above the majority of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 50 (45%) with (17%) from the 12-29 age range. Although hay fever affects more boys than girls, 75% of people who answered this survey were female.
When it came to actual symptoms, 84% reported sneezing, 78% runny nose, 80% itchy/watery/ red/swollen/sore eyes, and 78% reported nasal congestion.

Worryingly, 55% (a total of 332 people) also reported wheezing/shortness of breath/tight chest as symptoms for either themselves or their child.

Other symptoms reported were cough, catarrh, itch deep inside ears/ roof of mouth, itchy skin, tiredness, post-nasal drip, headaches, nose bleeds, facial pain, hives/ wheals on skin and poor sleep.

‘At best it’s a nuisance, at times when the symptoms gets worse can be debilitating. The throat clearing and sneezing is annoying to people around me. The itchy eyes and ears can be almost painful!’

How were you or your child initially diagnosed with Allergic Rhinitis (Hay fever)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergy specialist</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergy nurse specialist</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice nurse/Nurse practitioner</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self diagnosis</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The majority of respondents, 76%, were diagnosed by a healthcare professional with 54% diagnosed by their GP. Interestingly, 21% of respondents had self-diagnosed. As a patient charity whose goal is to raise awareness of allergy, it is very pleasing to see this number who are familiar with the symptoms of which they should be aware.
Some 46% respondents suffer like this all year round, with 49% symptomatic in spring only and 45% in the summer months. However, research shows the majority of allergic rhinitis is due to grass pollen (from May-July).

As the grass pollen season peaks, this is a very good time to highlight how allergic rhinitis can have such a negative impact on a person’s quality of life.

The majority of people surveyed knew what triggered their allergic rhinitis, with the majority being grass or tree pollen (62% grass, 61% tree pollen) and 25% of people not knowing what triggers their symptoms.

Other respondents reported their allergic trigger as house dust mite (44%) animal dander (37%), mould spores (28%) or weed pollen (25%).

A huge number (87%) reported that their allergic rhinitis affected their sleep (or their child’s sleep). This is very significant, as it can impact on how the person functions the next day at school or at work. A worrying 92% of respondents admitted that their symptoms affect their work, school or daily routine and 81% reported that their allergic rhinitis affects their mood in a negative way.

Most people surveyed say they would consider their symptoms (or their child’s) to be moderate (59%) or severe (35%).

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‘My son is unable to focus in lessons, often having to sit out and go to the nurse until the antihistamine top up kicks in, even then not a complete remedy. I am so worried about exams as well - he somehow muddles through. This can impact his prospects in life as well as health and self esteem.’

‘Quality of life seriously affected from March to September due to breathing difficulties which have been so severe I have ended up in A&E. I have two young sons and it casts a shadow over the whole of our spring and summer activities.’
The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30 and 50 (45%) with (17%) from the 12-29 age range. 75% of people who answered this survey were female, although hay fever affects more boys than girls.

Geographical regions in the UK and Ireland were sectioned and 41% of the responders came from either London or the South East of England. This again was probably due to the cohort on the database and not reflective of the true countrywide incidence but gives an indication of where the majority who answered this survey lived in the UK.

During the Spring/summer months of 2015, after completing an initial survey about their hay fever symptoms, a sample of an allergen barrier balm was sent to these people to be used during the hay fever season. A second questionnaire was then sent to each person to find out how their experience of using it impacted on their hay fever.

69% of the 168 people who answered this survey used the allergen barrier balm for longer than two weeks. 84% of the people had never tried the allergen barrier balm before. The majority of these found it helped with some of their symptoms (79%), with a further 7% reporting it helped with ALL of their symptoms.

The symptoms that it helped most with were; sneezing (68%), itchy nose (59%), stuffy nose (41%) and runny nose (43%). When discussing symptoms of allergic rhinitis, these are the very symptoms that past research studies show impact most on quality of life.

Some people found that it also helped with their itchy eyes (14%). It's worth noting that the barrier balm can be used on the face around the bones of the eyes where the rim of your sunglasses touch your face- not directly in contact with the eyes. This may provide a further barrier to stop pollen particles reaching the eyes and causing irritation and is worth trying.

94% of people found HayMax™ quick to be effective, 44% of whom said that it worked immediately and a further 35% within an hour or two.

94% of participants said that HayMax™ was easy to carry around. The barrier balm container is small, round and compact.

83% said they would recommend HayMax™ and 80% said that the drug-free allergen barrier balm 'worked well'.

Allergy UK is the leading medical charity providing advice, information and support to people with allergies and intolerances. Allergy UK acts as the 'voice' of allergy sufferers, representing the views and needs of those affected by this multi organ disease.

Allergy UK makes a difference through a dedicated helpline and network for sufferers. The charity provides invaluable information and guidance to empower sufferers so that they can manage their symptoms and receive appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Allergy UK Helpline
01322 619898
(9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)
www.allergyuk.org