# Hay fever symptoms worsen as climate change prolongs UK pollen season



Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, has become a significant concern for many individuals, especially with reports indicating that symptoms this year have intensified beyond usual expectations. Those typically reliant on over-the-counter remedies find little relief as the allergy season unfolds with unusual severity. This year's particularly challenging conditions can be attributed to a combination of climate change, urban pollution, and other coinciding environmental factors.

The changing climate is a primary culprit. Research shows that heightened levels of carbon dioxide and rising temperatures have lengthened pollen seasons and increased pollen production, with estimates suggesting a staggering 20% increase in pollen concentrations between 1990 and 2018. Moreover, this year in the UK, a notably dry and warm spring has exacerbated hay fever symptoms, as tree and grass pollen is now released earlier and persists longer than in past years. Birch pollen, which impacts approximately a quarter of UK hay fever sufferers, has seen especially pronounced peaks, as the dry weather inhibited natural cleansing from rainfall, prolonging exposure and compounding the distress felt by many.

Timing is also critical in managing hay fever effectively. Experts advise that to maximise the efficacy of allergy medications, particularly steroid nasal sprays, they should be commenced one to two weeks prior to the anticipated onset of pollen. For UK residents, this means initiating such treatments ideally by early March for tree pollen and late April for grasses. Beginning treatment late in the season is often perceived as ineffective, leading to further frustration for affected individuals.

For those battling with new sensitivities, it is worth noting that adults can develop allergies to pollen types that previously did not trigger symptoms. Common culprits include grass and birch pollen, both of which may begin to cause discomfort as people age.

To mitigate the impact of hay fever, reducing pollen exposure is paramount. Awareness of local pollen forecasts can help individuals plan outdoor activities while avoiding high pollen periods, typically mid-morning on dry, windy days. When going outside during these times, wearing a mask, such as an N95, can provide additional protection against inhaling irritants. Once indoors, changing clothes, showering, and employing HEPA filters in air purifiers can assist in minimising residual pollen exposure.

While non-drowsy antihistamines like fexofenadine, loratadine, and cetirizine often serve as first-line treatments, emerging research suggests that fexofenadine may offer superior relief for those with moderate to severe seasonal allergies. Consistent daily usage, especially when taken pre-emptively, proves most beneficial. For nasal congestion, nasal steroid sprays, such as fluticasone, have shown greater efficacy than antihistamines and should ideally be used as a long-term strategy.

Interestingly, while allergy wipes and saline nasal rinses have been suggested as additional relief methods, their effectiveness is supported by limited studies. The potential of probiotics has garnered attention, with some research indicating a diverse gut microbiome may help moderate allergic reactions. However, probiotic treatments are not a substitute for traditional management strategies.

For those experiencing severe, persistent symptoms, allergy immunotherapy offers a long-term solution. This treatment gradually desensitises individuals to specific allergens through increasing doses administered either via injections or sublingual tablets. Clinical studies have demonstrated significant symptom relief in up to 90% of participants following a complete course of this therapy, with lasting effects often observed for years after the treatment’s conclusion. New methods in immunotherapy are even being explored, with promising advancements suggesting significant symptom reductions may be achieved within a single season.

The intersection of technology and allergy care is also evolving. Today, smart monitors and mobile applications can track pollen and pollution levels in real time, providing personalised alerts that can help individuals avoid allergens before symptoms manifest. As allergy seasons grow increasingly long and intense, the integration of proactive measures and medical treatment can significantly alleviate the discomfort many experience.

In summary, while the phenomenon of worsening hay fever can be largely attributed to environmental changes and increased pollen production, individuals have a variety of strategies—both preventative and reactive—to help manage their symptoms. Staying informed, adopting exposure-reduction techniques, and engaging with targeted allergy treatments can collectively improve the quality of life for many affected by seasonal allergies.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[2]](https://time.com/6278183/allergy-season-worse-health-impact/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[2]](https://time.com/6278183/allergy-season-worse-health-impact/), [[5]](https://time.com/4684480/why-an-early-spring-is-very-bad-news-for-your-health/)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[3]](https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2025/03/10/allergy-season-atlanta-climate-change), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2024/04/12/climate-change-impacts-allergy-season)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2025/03/10/allergy-season-atlanta-climate-change), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2024/04/12/climate-change-impacts-allergy-season)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://time.com/4684480/why-an-early-spring-is-very-bad-news-for-your-health/), [[6]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[6]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://time.com/6278183/allergy-season-worse-health-impact/), [[6]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/16/hay-fever-may-get-worse-due-to-climate-change-says-met-office)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2024/04/12/climate-change-impacts-allergy-season)
* Paragraph 11 – [[2]](https://time.com/6278183/allergy-season-worse-health-impact/), [[5]](https://time.com/4684480/why-an-early-spring-is-very-bad-news-for-your-health/)
* Paragraph 12 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[6]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/)
* Paragraph 13 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html), [[3]](https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2025/03/10/allergy-season-atlanta-climate-change), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/16/hay-fever-may-get-worse-due-to-climate-change-says-met-office)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/hay-fever-symptoms-allergy-itchy-b2757462.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/6278183/allergy-season-worse-health-impact/> - Climate change is significantly contributing to longer, more intense allergy seasons, with higher carbon dioxide levels and increased temperatures leading to earlier and more prolific pollen production. Research indicates a 20% increase in pollen concentrations and extended allergy seasons from 1990 to 2018. These worsening conditions result in severe symptoms like itchy eyes, congestion, and fatigue, which can affect sleep and daily performance. Persistent allergies can also cause complications, such as infections and increased asthma symptoms. To manage these challenges, experts recommend preparing ahead by starting medications before symptoms begin and using targeted therapies like nasal sprays or eye drops. Individuals with severe allergies may benefit from immunotherapy to reduce sensitivities over time. As allergy seasons continue to worsen, proactive measures and detailed planning are essential for effective management.
3. <https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2025/03/10/allergy-season-atlanta-climate-change> - La saison des allergies à Atlanta s'allonge, et le changement climatique en est la cause. Une nouvelle analyse révèle que la période de croissance sans gel s'est allongée entre 1970 et 2024 dans près de 90 % des grandes villes américaines, entraînant une saison des allergies plus longue. Atlanta enregistre de plus en plus de jours avec des taux de pollen modérés à élevés. Selon le Dr Lily Hwang, les patients signalant des symptômes d'allergies saisonnières sont en augmentation depuis la mi-février. Le changement climatique prolonge non seulement les saisons de pollen, mais les rend également plus intenses en raison de la pollution thermique. La production de pollen à l'échelle nationale devrait augmenter considérablement avec la pollution élevée en CO2. Pour atténuer les symptômes, il est recommandé d'utiliser des rinçages salins, des sprays nasaux stéroïdes et des gouttes ophtalmiques.
4. <https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2024/04/12/climate-change-impacts-allergy-season> - La saison des allergies à Seattle devient plus longue et intense en raison du changement climatique et des printemps plus chauds qui incitent les plantes à produire davantage de pollen sur de plus longues périodes. Selon Dilawar Khokhar de l'Université de Washington, les saisons d'allergies s'intensifient et durent plus longtemps. Par exemple, en 2023, la ville d'Everett a enregistré une augmentation de 54 % du taux de pollen par rapport à 2022. La région de Puget Sound, avec sa haute densité d'arbres comme les cèdres, les aulnes, et les peupliers, exacerbe la situation pour les personnes allergiques. Entre 1970 et 2021, la durée moyenne de la saison des allergies à Seattle a augmenté de 17 jours. Pour atténuer les symptômes, il est conseillé de changer de vêtements et de se laver après être sorti.
5. <https://time.com/4684480/why-an-early-spring-is-very-bad-news-for-your-health/> - Due to climate change and other weather patterns, the U.S. is experiencing an early arrival of spring, up to three weeks ahead in some regions. This phenomenon has already been observed in areas like the southern Great Plains, Southeast Atlantic Coast, and Washington, D.C., among others, and it poses significant health challenges. An earlier spring leads to longer allergy seasons due to extended pollen production. Additionally, temperature fluctuations increase the chances for disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes and ticks to thrive, posing risks for illnesses like malaria, Zika, and Lyme disease. The increased possibility of flooding from early snow melts raises concerns about waterborne disease outbreaks. These environmental changes impact food supply safety and availability, livestock, and pollinating insects. While milder temperatures can promote outdoor activities, they serve as indicators of broader, potentially harmful climate changes.
6. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/> - Hay fever is a common allergy that causes sneezing, coughing, and itchy eyes. You cannot cure it, but there are things you can do to help your symptoms, or medicines you can take to help. Symptoms of hay fever include sneezing and coughing, a runny or blocked nose, itchy, red or watery eyes, itchy throat, mouth, nose and ears, loss of smell, pain around the sides of your head and your forehead, headache, and feeling tired. Symptoms are usually worse between late March and September, especially when it's warm, humid and windy. This is when the pollen count is at its highest. Hay fever can last for weeks or months, unlike a cold, which usually goes away after 1 to 2 weeks. There's currently no cure for hay fever and you cannot prevent it. But you can do things to ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high. A pharmacist can help with hay fever. Speak to a pharmacist if you have hay fever. They can give you advice and suggest the best treatments to help with symptoms, such as antihistamine drops, tablets or nasal sprays, and steroid nasal sprays. Some antihistamines can make you very sleepy, so speak to your pharmacist about non-drowsy antihistamines if you need to.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/16/hay-fever-may-get-worse-due-to-climate-change-says-met-office> - The Met Office pollen forecast shows that some areas are getting a double hit. Hay fever symptoms include sneezing, coughing, a runny or blocked nose, as well as red, itchy or watery eyes. Sufferers can also experience headaches, earache or lose their sense of smell. Scientists predict that as global heating causes a higher frequency of hotter, drier summers and warmer wetter winters in the UK, the seasonal pollen pattern could change. There's a growing scientific consensus that climate change will impact the pollen season in the UK. It could result in longer pollen seasons. Urban areas tend to have lower pollen counts than the countryside, but research has also shown that people in urban areas experience more severe symptoms because pollution can exacerbate the body's reaction. Prof Sheena Cruickshank, an immunologist at the University of Manchester who carried out the research, said: "Pollution can damage the protective barriers in our nose and respiratory tracts so we're more likely to get things in, we're seeing that pollution can have an effect on immune sensing ... and it can narrow airways and make it difficult to breathe.