

Patient information

Rhinitis

What is rhinitis?

Rhinitis means inflammation, not infection, of the surfaces lining the nose, sinuses and inner ear. Common symptoms are sneezing and a blocked, runny and itchy nose. Rhinitis affects both nostrils at the same time. It may or may not be caused by allergy.

- If the cause is an allergen e.g. grass, symptoms occur during the pollen season, (when the grasses pollinate) and we call it **Allergic seasonal rhinitis** or **hay fever**. However, if it is caused by house dust mite this can cause **Allergic perennial rhinitis**.
- If the symptoms are usually present throughout the year, and unrelated to allergy we call it **Non-allergic perennial rhinitis**. This is the commoner form in children, caused possibly by the irritants and pollutants we breathe.

What are the symptoms?

Rhinitis can present with various symptoms. Not all symptoms need to be present to make the diagnosis. Symptoms can be from a:

- Runny nose: Sniffing and snorting.
- Bad breath from the mucus running down the back of the throat.
- Lots of sore throats, again from this mucus in the throat.
- Cough, which may or may not sound phlegmy; worse when lying down.
- Stomach ache from swallowing mucus, can cause loose stools.
- Blocked nose
- Always sniffing but doesn't clear nose when asked to blow.
- Twitches and rubs nose incessantly to try to unblock it.
- Mouth breathes and chokes on food as can't breathe when eating.

- Can affect sleep badly where child is restless and snores.
- Always has bags or blue discolouration under eyes.
- Children with hay fever might complain of itchy nose, palate or ears.

What are the effects of rhinitis?

The severity of rhinitis can vary. Some people have mild nose irritation which comes and goes, and causes little trouble. On the other hand, some people become distressed by regular daily symptoms. Severe symptoms can affect school and home and social life. Effects include:

- School absences from always being poorly.
- Poor sleep will cause tiredness during the day which makes young children restless and fidgety, poorly behaved and sleepy – all affecting school performance.
- Blocked ears can lead to: hearing problems which may affect speech development.
- Frequent ear infections - these children often need grommets.
- Stomach aches from mucus are 'treated' by excessive drinking; this together with the stomach ache can result in the child having a poor appetite.

How can we treat rhinitis?

Rhinitis is like asthma in that it is a chronic condition which cannot be cured but can be controlled by regular (daily) treatment, just like daily asthma inhalers. Commonly used treatments are:

- Avoiding the cause of the allergy if possible and where relevant.
- Antihistamines eg Cetirizine, Loratadine, Fexofenadine. These act by drying excess mucus.
- Steroid sprays or drops eg Nasonex, Avamys. These act best at reducing swelling.

Children with seasonal symptoms will need to take medicines only when they get their symptoms; whereas children with perennial rhinitis need to take medicines all through the year. Some children who have grass pollen or tree pollen hay fever that does not respond to medicines may benefit from immunotherapy (also called desensitisation).

With thanks to the Children's Allergy Clinic, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, for permission to reproduce this information.

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