
Rhinitis

What is rhinitis?

Rhinitis is a condition where inflammation affects the linings of the air passages in the nose. Symptoms include stuffiness, itching, runny nose, sneezing and post-nasal drip.

Swelling in the nose can block the passages between the nose and the sinuses, leading to pain in the face and sometimes infection of the sinuses called sinusitis. Swelling can also block the passages between the nose and the ears called the Eustachian tube. This can lead to earache, hearing loss or popping in the ears.

Rhinitis often occurs with conjunctivitis which is redness or itching of the eyes. There may also be cough, tight chest, wheezing or shortness of breath, suggesting asthma.

There are different types of rhinitis. The correct treatment may depend upon the type of rhinitis you have.

Allergic Rhinoconjunctivitis (Hayfever)

This refers to allergic symptoms of the nose and the eyes. It may be seasonal (intermittent) or year round (perennial). It may occur in the spring, summer or fall due to pollen and mold spores. The pollen or mold spores cause symptoms only in people who are allergic to them.

Tree pollen is in the air in the spring (March, April, May), grass pollen in the summer (May, June, July), ragweed pollen in the fall (August and September), and mold spores in the late summer and fall (July to October).

Types of treatment . . .

There are 3 types of treatment for hay fever:

- avoidance of the substances causing it
- medication
- allergen injection treatment or allergy shots

Perennial rhinitis or year round rhinitis

With perennial rhinitis, symptoms such as blocked or runny nose, sneezing and itching are present all year round. Usually the symptoms are less severe than with hay fever, but can sometimes cause problems with work or sleep.

Perennial rhinitis may lead to other problems such as sinusitis or ear infections. Some causes are house dust mites or pets in the home and substances at work. If a person is allergic to cats, and there is a cat at home, the cat is probably a cause of the rhinitis.

Treatment for perennial rhinitis is similar to hay fever.

Vasomotor rhinitis

Some people, especially as they get older, develop a watery discharge from the nose. This can be almost all the time. It can last for minutes or hours everyday.

It is often worse when there is a change in temperature such as coming in from outside or when a hot or spicy food is taken. There may be some blockage of the nose or sneezing at times but the main symptom is a watery nasal drip.

Often, Atrovent nasal spray (ipratropium bromide) can stop the watery discharge. This is taken in the smallest dosage needed.

Other nose problems

In rhinitis with nasal polyps, the swelling of the lining of the nose forms little grape-like enlargements. There is often a loss of the sense of smell as well as blockage of the nose.

Nasal blockage can also occur during pregnancy. The blockage generally disappears when the pregnancy is over.

Medical conditions such as low thyroid function, or mechanical blockage from a deviated nasal septum, may also cause nose symptoms.

In children, a common cause of nasal blockage is enlargement of the adenoids that lie at the back of the nose. A rare cause of blockage of one side of the nose in children is from some object pushed into the nose and left there.

Tumors can be a very rare cause of nasal blockage.