

SPRINGTIME SNEEZES

Already the signs of Spring are all around us; spring bulbs are pushing through the soil and buds are appearing on the trees. For most of us, this is the time of year when we look forward to warmer weather, lighter nights and the chance to spend some time out-of-doors, but for about one person in five – over ten million people in England alone – it marks the onset of the annual misery of hay fever, a type of allergic rhinitis triggered by pollen or spores.

These substances are harmless to most people, but hay fever sufferers experience an allergic reaction which results in the production of histamine and other substances in cells around the eyes, nose and mouth. These in turn cause inflammation in the nose (rhinitis) and eyes (conjunctivitis) and sometimes in the throat and sinuses. Hay fever can be a mild inconvenience, lasting for only a day or two, but it can also be a serious problem lasting for weeks, or even months, with symptoms causing severe difficulty in sleeping or concentrating. The peak period for sufferers allergic to grass pollen lasts from mid-May to early August, but some people are allergic to other pollens: tree pollen appears from mid-March, and some pollens and fungal spores persist until November.

There is no cure for hay fever, but there are treatments to ease the symptoms. These include antihistamine tablets, nasal (nose) sprays and eye drops. Your pharmacist can advise which preparation is likely to be most effective for your symptoms. Your doctor may prescribe corticosteroid nasal sprays or drops instead of antihistamines if your main symptom is a blocked nose or if you are pregnant or breast feeding. Corticosteroids are more effective than antihistamine tablets at preventing and relieving nasal symptoms, including sneezing and congestion. They also relieve itchy, watery eyes. They are most effective if you start using them a couple of weeks before your symptoms usually begin, and work best when used regularly.

You can also relieve your symptoms by reducing your exposure to pollen as much as possible. If you can, stay indoors when the pollen count is high. Keep doors and windows closed and draw curtains to keep out the sun if you feel too warm. Vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth to avoid spreading pollen around. Keep pets out of doors during the pollen season, and don't bring fresh flowers into the house. Don't smoke or let other people smoke in your house; tobacco smoke increases the irritation in your eyes, nose, throat and airways. If you do go out, wear wrap-around sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes. Change your clothes and take a shower when you get home. If you travel by car, keep the windows closed and consider fitting a pollen filter in your heating or air-conditioning system.

SURGERY UPDATE

The surgery will be closed all day on:

Friday 25 March 2016 (Good Friday)

Monday 28 March 2016 (Easter Monday)

Monday 2 May 2016 (Mayday Bank Holiday)

Monday 30 May 2016 (Spring Bank Holiday)

We will also close as usual for staff training between 12.00.noon and 1.30.pm. every Thursday.

If you need medical assistance at any time when the surgery is closed, please call the Out of Hours Service on **111** or, in an emergency, call **999**.

NEED HELP TO STOP SMOKING?

Help, support and advice for people who are trying to stop smoking is now provided by Lifeline Newcastle on behalf of the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Sessions are held just down the road at the Molineux Health Centre. You don't need a referral from your GP, so if you are trying to give up – for the first or the fiftieth time – get in touch now. You can make contact by telephone or email, as below:

Landline: 0191 269 1103

Mobile: 07809 105837

Email: stopsmoking.newcastle@lifeline.cjsh.nhs.uk

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD!

You may have noticed some new faces around the Heaton Road Surgery in recent months, and we'd like to take the opportunity of introducing our new colleagues.

You may remember Dr. Polly Chadwick, who spent some time with us not long ago as a GP Registrar during her training. Dr. Chadwick seems to have enjoyed the experience, as after enjoying six months of travelling she has returned to the Practice as a salaried GP.

We also have a new Practice Nurse, Katie Elliott, who joined us in February, having previously worked on a paediatric ward and as School Nurse in a private school.

Finally, we are pleased to report that we now have a Practice Clinical Pharmacist as part of our team. Ben Kelly-Fatemi's role will be to see patients with long-term conditions such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma, to carry out medication reviews and to support our GPs behind the scenes with hospital communications, patient's medication boxes and repeat prescriptions. Overall, this will enable our Practice to provide an even better service to a lot of our patients.

We extend a warm welcome to all our new colleagues, and hope that their time at Heaton Road Surgery will be challenging, rewarding and enjoyable.

ON-LINE ACCESS AND SERVICES

As explained in Newsletter 2, you can book or cancel appointments and order repeat prescriptions online, using the 'Patient Access' website. You can also check the records of your immunisations, allergies and test results.

Using 'Patient Access' is easy and – because you don't need to call or visit the surgery as often – there is less pressure on Reception, allowing us to provide a better and faster service for everyone. If you have access to the internet, why not register now? There isn't a downside – everybody wins!

From this year you can use 'Patient Access' to see most other parts of your personal medical record as well, but to ensure that complete confidentiality is maintained you'll need to fill in a new registration form and provide evidence of your identity. We've prepared a leaflet to explain exactly how the new system works and what you need to do to register for the extended service – you can pick up a copy of the leaflet and application form from reception. Of course, if you aren't already using 'Patient Access', completing the new registration form will also give you access to all of the existing services.

Patient Access may well expand even further in the future – we'll keep you informed through this Newsletter as the system develops.

PATIENTS' GROUP

The next quarterly meeting of our Patients' Group will be held on **Tuesday 14 June**, starting at 6.00pm. As the Surgery is open late on Tuesdays the meeting will be held upstairs – please ask for directions at Reception.

Any patient registered with the Practice is entitled to attend and take part in the discussions – just come along and take a seat.

WOULD YOU LIKE A FRIEND?

If you are a pensioner and are not as mobile as you once were, would it make life easier if you could rely on someone to help you out with shopping, or to deal with things like collecting prescriptions, walking the dog or even changing a light bulb? If family members or long-term friends live too far away to visit regularly, the Newcastle Good Neighbours Service can help. You'd be visited every week and would get regular and dependable support in dealing with the kind of jobs which used to be easy to do but seem to become more and more difficult to cope with as you grow older.

'Good Neighbours' is part of the Royal Voluntary Service, and it's completely free. All of the friendly volunteers have enhanced DBS* clearance, and some of them are pensioners themselves.

You can join the scheme, or find out more about it, by telephoning **(0191) 300 9334**, or you can talk it over with your GP at your next appointment.

* DBS stands for 'Disclosure and Barring Service'. From 2012, this body took over the work of the Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguard Authority in relation to checking anyone applying to work in certain jobs, especially those involving children or vulnerable adults.

COULD YOU HELP SOMEONE?

If you have time available, and would like to help someone in the circumstances described above, you can find out more about what's involved by contacting RVS using the details shown below:

Landline: 0191 300 9334

Mobile: 07442 505791

Email: tynewearhub@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk

HEATON ROAD HEALTH TIP No.11

Don't forget that exercise is good for you in all sorts of ways – the benefits go far beyond improving your physical fitness. The amount of exercise you can handle depends upon your general level of fitness at the time you make a start, but the ideal is 30 minutes of moderately intensive exercise five times a week. You can split the 30 minutes into three 10-minute blocks if you like. You'll need to do rather more if you're exercising to lose weight.