

# EYE HEALTHCARE

## HAYFEVER AND THE EYES

So prevalent as this time of the year (late may to early august) are the symptoms of hay fever, which can have considerable effects on the eyes. The high pollen count causes an allergic reaction of the conjunctiva (clear membrane covering the white of the eye) and as it becomes inflamed causes the classic symptoms of sticky, itchy, gritty and red eyes, with occasional sensitivity to light.

Your Optometrist can easily confirm these symptoms of eye allergy by evertting (turning around) the upper eye lid and revealing a characteristic 'cobble stone' appearance of the membrane behind, instead of the normal smooth one. It often involves restricting or stopping contact lens wear for the affected period.

The main treatment of the symptom in the eyes are antihistamine drops e.g. 'otrivine' which work effectively by suppressing any swelling and inflammation, where they act to prevent an over reaction of the body's immune cells called 'mast' cells.

In severe cases, steroid drops may be needed. The pollen levels can also be reduced by closing windows and keeping surfaces clear with a damp duster. Outside work e.g. mowing the lawn should be restricted to the evening as pollen levels are lower.

Certainly pollen, particularly during these summer months is the major eye allergen but things like 'mold' (e.g. in compost piles, old shower curtains), 'proteins' (found on furry pets) and 'dust mites' (e.g. in old upholstered furniture) will cause similar symptoms in the eyes. It's fair then that true identification will enable us at least to reduce if not remove these annoying symptoms.

Noel McCrystal  
BSc.(Hons.)MCOptom.Dip.Sc.V MASv.P

Scotch Street Centre  
T: 028 87722379  
[www.mccrystalopticians.com](http://www.mccrystalopticians.com)