

## 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.

### EVENING SURGERIES

Since the beginning of October we have been offering evening appointments to see a Doctor between 6.00pm and 7.20pm. on one day in each week. These appointments are usually available on Tuesdays, but occasionally we need to change the day to Wednesday to fit in with holidays and training commitments.

If you'd like further details, or would like to book one of these appointments, just contact reception in the normal way.

### SURGERY UPDATES

The Surgery will be closed for staff training from 12.30pm. on the following dates:

Tuesday 17 May 2011

Wednesday 8 June 2011

Thursday 7 July 2011

Wednesday 7 September 2011

In an emergency, please contact the Out of Hours Service on **08450 568060** or if necessary call **999**.

In the meantime, we apologise for any difficulties encountered by visitors to the surgery while replacement of our flat roof is in progress.

## TAKE A BREAK!

The 'Take a Break' service provided by Crossroads Care is available to carers living in Gateshead who are over 18 and are not already receiving a care package which includes a break from caring. It can provide replacement care to enable the carer to take a break or it can provide a personalised arrangement to help improve the carer's health and wellbeing. These examples give some idea of the possibilities.

Ann has ME (Myalgic Encephalopathy) and cares for her husband who is suffering from dementia. Take a Break provided Ann with replacement care while she had a massage. This boosted her health and increased her energy.

John cares for his son, who has learning difficulties. As a result, he doesn't get a chance to pursue his own interests and hobbies. Take a Break provided John with a year's gym membership.

Peter looks after his wife, who has MS (Multiple Sclerosis). He needed a break from his caring role and wanted to join a cycling club, but couldn't afford to buy a bike. Take a Break enabled Peter to buy a bike, allowing him a break from caring and a chance to meet new friends and improve his own health.

For further information contact Louise Whitfield at (01207) 549780.

## CHILDHOOD VACCINATIONS

One of the most important things parents can do for their children is to make sure that they have all their routine childhood vaccinations. It's the most effective way of keeping them protected against infectious diseases. Vaccinations are quick, safe and effective. Children who are **not** vaccinated have an increased risk of catching infectious illnesses such as pneumonia, meningitis and measles. The benefits of vaccinations far outweigh the risk of side effects.

If travelling abroad on holiday, children who have not been fully immunized have a greater risk of picking up infectious diseases. It is also worth remembering that young adults who do not have a full immunisation record may have problems if they wish to go to university or to travel widely.

## ON-LINE SERVICES

You can now make appointments to see your doctor, or place orders for repeat prescriptions on-line. To do this, you need to register at Reception – we're here from 8.00.am to 12.30.pm and from 1.30.pm. to 6.30.pm., Monday to Friday. When you register, we'll give you all the information you need.

## ASTHMA REVIEW

Asthma is a condition that affects the airways – the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. The usual symptoms are coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and tightness in the chest. It's a variable condition, and some asthma sufferers can go for months, or even years without suffering significant symptoms or needing to use their inhalers. Medication using an inhaler helps to control asthma symptoms, but it is important that these are used correctly, and that the "right" type of inhaler is used.

If you are asthmatic it is important that you visit your doctor for an annual asthma review. This will include a review of your inhalers, even if you are not using them on a regular basis.

If you have not requested an inhaler for a significant length of time it will automatically be removed from your repeat prescription list, and a review appointment will be required before a new inhaler can be prescribed.

## YOUNGER PATIENTS

If you are aged between 20 and 35, we'd be very interested in your views about the services offered by our Practice. If you'd like to make your opinion count, just give us a call at 0191 413 1399 after 10.00.am., Monday to Friday, or complete the suggestions form in the waiting room.

## GRANGE ROAD HEALTH TIP No.4

High salt intake is linked to raised blood pressure, which in turn increases the risk of heart disease or a stroke. The recommended maximum daily intake is 6 grams – about one teaspoonful – for an adult, but three-quarters of this amount is already contained in the food we eat, even before we add salt in cooking or at the table. Most of us eat too much salt, but here are some ideas for reducing your intake, even if you find it hard to give up added salt completely.

- Use fresh or dried herbs and spices to add flavour to vegetables.
- Where possible, use fresh or frozen vegetables.
- If you use canned vegetables, buy those canned without salt, or rinse the contents after opening to get rid of any excess salt.
- Choose breakfast cereals which are low in sodium: 1 gram of sodium is equivalent to 2.5 grams of salt.
- Be sparing with soy sauce – each teaspoonful contains almost 1 gram of salt.

