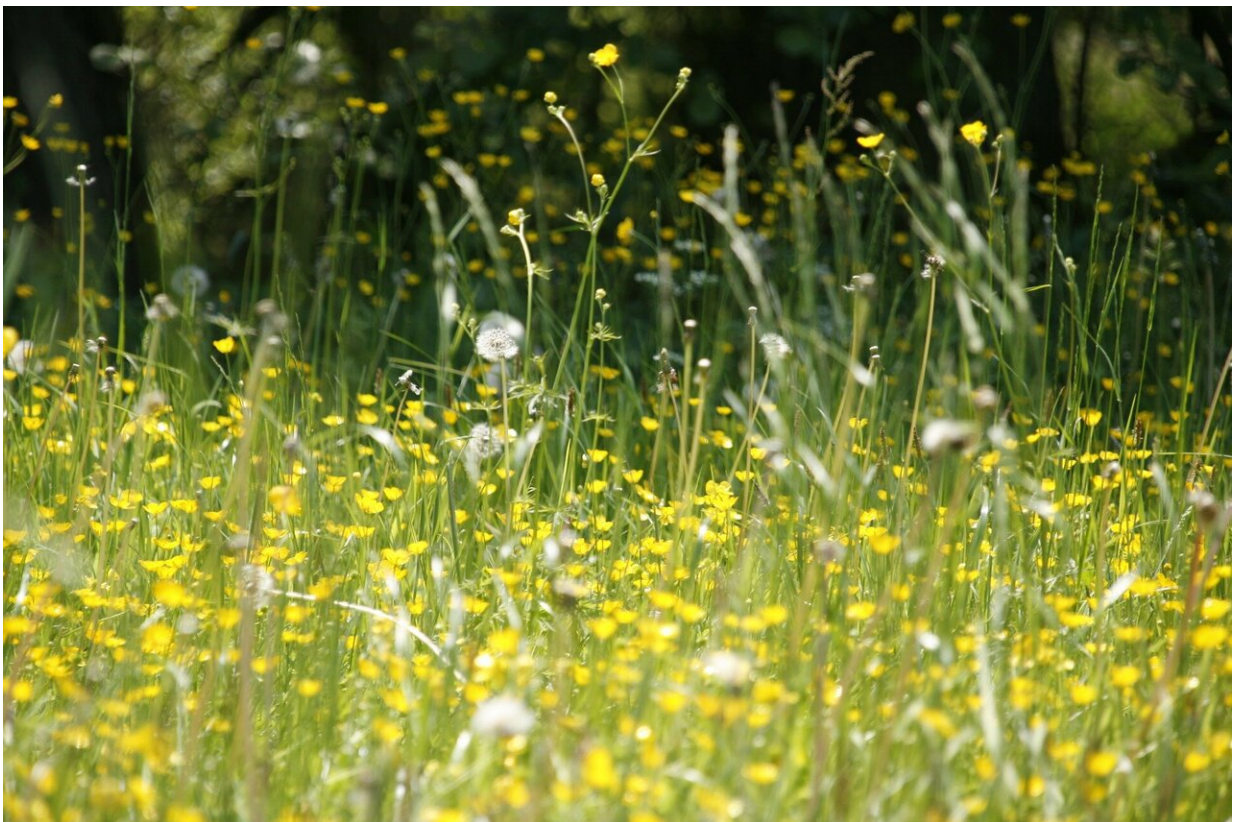


Four reasons your hay fever may be worse when you move to a different country—and how to manage it

October 19 2023, by Samuel J. White and Philippe B. Wilson



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There are many things a person will expect to be different when moving to a new country. The language, the social norms, the cuisine—even the

weather.

One thing you might not expect to be different when moving abroad is your [hay fever symptoms](#). Yet, odd as it may sound, many expats report [worse seasonal allergy symptoms](#) after moving to a new country.

While there are many reasons your [hay fever](#) might be worse when you move to a new country, the good news is there are also many things you can do to ease your suffering.

1. New allergens

The primary reason your hay fever may worsen when you move abroad is the [change in allergens](#). Each continent has its unique mix of plants, trees and grasses—and they release pollen at different times throughout the year.

When you move to a different country, you expose yourself to new allergens that your [immune system](#) may not be accustomed to. This may cause your body to react more strongly to these [unfamiliar triggers](#), leading to more severe hay fever symptoms. For some, this may cause them to develop hay fever for the first time.

2. Different climate

Moving to a different country often means experiencing new [climate patterns and seasonal changes](#). These variations can have a profound effect on hay fever sufferers.

For instance, if you move from a temperate climate to a tropical one, you may encounter perennial allergens—such as dust mites and mold—that thrive in [warm and humid environments](#). Similarly, if you

move to a Mediterranean country, you may encounter [olive pollen](#) for the first time, which is a common hay fever trigger.

The timing and peak of pollen seasons can also be vastly different depending on the part of the world you're in—with [some regions](#) (such as Switzerland) having [longer, more intense](#) pollen seasons than others.

This may not only worsen seasonal allergy symptoms, it may also cause symptoms to be longer lasting.

3. Your genetics

[Individual genetics](#) play a significant role in how a person responds to allergens. This means some people are inherently more susceptible to hay fever due to their [genetic makeup](#)—making them [more vulnerable](#) to the allergens they encounter in a new country.

We don't know which genes are linked with specific pollen allergies. But if you're worried about your likelihood of developing seasonal allergies in the country you're moving to, private [genetic tests](#) can determine your risk.

4. Air pollution

Poor air quality can affect [hay fever symptoms](#). Moving to an area with higher levels of [air pollution](#) may make your [hay fever symptoms worse](#). This is because pollutants, such as diesel exhaust fumes, can interact with allergens, particularly those that irritate the [respiratory system](#), such as mold and dust.

Managing symptoms

Your hay fever symptoms will probably improve over time as your [immune system adapts to the new environment](#). Your degree of [allergen exposure](#), which allergens you're most sensitive to and how effectively you're managing symptoms will also affect the [severity of your symptoms](#).

It's essential to stay vigilant and continue managing your hay fever to prevent chronic symptoms and potential complications.

Here are a few easy things you can do:

1. Avoid allergens: Try to [avoid exposure to allergens](#) that trigger symptoms. This may mean [staying indoors](#) on days when [pollen count is high](#) or wearing a mask when outdoors. A standard surgical mask works well to [filter pollen particles](#).
2. Use air filters: Consider using [Hepa \(high-efficiency particulate air\) filters](#) in your home or workplace to help remove airborne allergens. These work on all types of allergens, including indoor allergies such as mold, as well as outdoor allergens such as pollen.
3. Close windows: [Closing windows](#) during high [pollen](#) counts will [prevent allergens from entering your home](#). This should reduce hay fever severity.
4. Take antihistamines: These are [medications](#) that help reduce symptoms by blocking the effects of histamine, a chemical released by cells during an allergic reaction. The best antihistamines for hay fever are oral H1 antihistamines (such as cetirizine or loratidine) or nasal corticosteroids. These should ideally be taken before exposure to allergens and should be continued throughout the allergy season. It's important to talk to

your doctor before starting any new treatment for hay fever to ensure you're taking the [right type for you](#).

5. Consider [immunotherapy](#): Immunotherapy, also known as allergy shots, can help reduce hay fever symptoms by desensitizing your immune system to specific allergens over time. Immunotherapy needs to be done multiple times and can take [several months or even years](#) to provide full benefits. But since immunotherapy modifies the body's immune response to allergens, it provides long-lasting relief from hay fever symptoms.
6. Manage stress: Stress can make [hay fever symptoms worse](#). This is because [chronic stress](#) elevates cortisol (a stress hormone) levels. Cortisol negatively affects immune cells, changing their function. The body also releases histamines when stressed. Increased histamine levels in your bloodstream can worsen [allergy](#) symptoms. Managing stress through [meditation, yoga or deep breathing](#) may help to reduce cortisol levels—and subsequently hay fever symptoms.

If you're someone who has recently moved to a new country and found your seasonal allergies are worse than usual, rest assured this is normal. Just as it'll take time to adjust to your way of life, it will also take your body time to adjust to the new environment you're in. Reducing allergen exposure as much as you can will go a long way in reducing symptom severity.

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