

ANTIHISTAMINES

What are antihistamines?

Antihistamines are medicines often used to relieve symptoms of allergies, such as hay fever, hives, conjunctivitis and reactions to insect bites or stings. They are also sometimes used to prevent motion sickness and as a short-term treatment for sleeping difficulties (insomnia).

There's not much evidence to suggest any particular antihistamine is better than any other at relieving allergy symptoms. Some people find certain types work well for them and others do not. You may need to try more than one type to find one that works for you. Non-drowsy antihistamines are generally the best option, as they're less likely to make you feel sleepy. But types that make you feel sleepy may be better if your symptoms affect your sleep.

Speak to a pharmacist or your GP before taking antihistamines if you're already taking other medicines. There may be a risk the medicines could affect each other, which could stop either from working properly or increase the risk of side effects.

An antihistamine tablet typically starts to work within 30 minutes after being taken. The peak of effectiveness is typically within 1-2 hours after being taken.

Antihistamines are generally more effective when taken constantly rather than intermittently. This is particularly applicable for people with hay fever (seasonal allergic rhinitis). In the summer months the pollen count is generally higher and you may be in contact with the allergen on a regular basis. Taking the medication regularly will help keep your symptoms under control. Their effectiveness will also depend on the dose you take and what form the medicine is given in.

Who can take antihistamines?

Most people can safely take antihistamines. But speak to your pharmacist if you:

- are pregnant
- are breastfeeding
- are looking for a medicine for a young child
- are taking other medicines
- have an underlying condition, such as heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease or epilepsy

Some antihistamines may not be suitable in these cases. Your pharmacist can recommend one that's best for you.

Always read the leaflet that comes with your particular brand for further information.