

How to stop hayfever ruining students' exam chances

(source - <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/offering-hayfever-advice-to-students>)

Hayfever can seriously hinder students' chances of achieving their best during the examination season. Al Campbell offers some survival advice.



Armed with recent statistics nobody with any sense of fair play would schedule the most important exams of the year for May and June. We're talking hayfever season – a time of year when up to half of your students face a debilitating condition that means they have every chance of underperforming.

If you are not prone to hayfever you probably don't appreciate just how desperate it can make you feel –

15 per cent of those who suffer claim it totally wipes them out. Writing as a sufferer I have only sympathy.

In terms of exam performance the headline numbers, based on a range of scientific studies, are mind-boggling:

- Up to 50 per cent of students report hayfever symptoms during exams.
- ***A hayfever sufferer is 40 per cent more likely to drop a grade from January to summer.***
- In general, 16 to 24-year-olds are the worst sufferers (this survey did not include under-16s).
- Perhaps the scariest fact of all is that the UK is the hayfever centre of the world and experts predict that by 2030 as much as 45 per cent of the UK population will be sufferers.

Hayfever and exam performance

If you get hayfever on an exam day you are going to be generally miserable and that's bad enough – you never perform your best if you feel lousy. But with hayfever you get huge collateral impacts into the bargain.

Your runny nose means you will dehydrate much more quickly and dehydration of only two per cent leads to a 30 per cent reduction in performance. You will also be taking anti-histamines and that can also dehydrate you (take a clear water bottle with you to the exam).

If you take the wrong anti-histamines you may feel drowsy and hayfever can seriously affect sleep patterns, which in turn affects concentration and exam performance.

There are some perhaps unexpected facts too. Contrary to popular belief, ***hayfever is actually 15 per cent worse in urban areas due to other environmental factors, such as air pollution, causing pollen to concentrate more.***

The condition of a lifestyle

As with most things in life and health, ***hayfever is linked to lifestyle***. According to the Kleenex 2010 Hay Fever Report those who have the condition but suffer least have: lower stress levels, a healthy diet, get regular exercise and enjoy more than seven hours' sleep a night.

Probably not exactly your average student on an average exam day then. But sorting out your lifestyle can mitigate the problems.

Hayfever is only really the body's response to a range of stimuli that provoke a symptomatic reaction from the immune system. If you can steer clear of the stimuli then you don't get the symptoms as badly. So the first and simplest remedy is to try to hide from the cause – pollen.

Pollen is incredibly light and during the day quickly rises up into warm air, then falls back to earth in the evening. Avoiding being outside at those times of day is a great start – although not very practical if you have an early morning exam. ***Keep the bedroom windows/doors shut if possible.***

The other thing is that nature designed pollen to stick to absolutely anything. In particular it will stick to hair, which tends to be really close to your face and nose. ***Wearing a hat (and your hair up if long)*** at high pollen times is a real help. ***Wrap-around sunglasses*** are good.

Showering every night also helps as you wash off the pollen you have accumulated during the day and ***get a better night's sleep***. Don't forget that ***pollen loves pets*** – a harmless hug with the family pooch can turn into a sneezing nightmare.

Pollen also sticks to clothes. While it sounds ridiculous, getting the ***vacuum cleaner out and running it over a blazer or top*** you tend to wear every day will seriously cut down the personal pollen count. ***Changing pillowcases and bedding regularly*** really helps and also wearing fresh clothes on the morning of any exams.

Medication

A range of **hayfever medication** is available from the chemist, or by prescription from the doctor. Those who use them every year often find one sort works better for them than others. It is not uncommon to find one type works for the first couple of weeks but then you see a better reaction to a different brand.

A big problem with sufferers is that they don't start taking medication until the symptoms start to occur. **Anti-histamines work best if the treatment starts in anticipation of the problem.** Students with a track record of hayfever should be taking their anti-histamines already.

Al Campbell is CEO and editor in chief of Doctor Wellgood, a new online health and wellbeing magazine and resource for students and young adults. - See more at: <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/offering-hayfever-advice-to-students#sthash.XIETBe9w.dpuf>

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