ALLERGY RHINO

White Paper

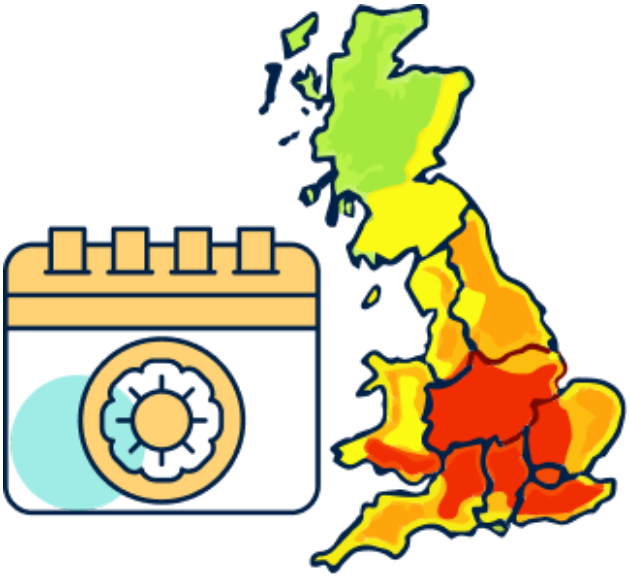
Hay Fever in Exam Season: Helping Students with Allergy Immunotherapy

Introduction: For many students, the stress of exam season is compounded by the sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes of hay fever. If your child is one of the countless teens who suffer from seasonal allergies, you may have noticed how hard it is for them to focus on revision when every sniffle is a distraction. Hay fever isn't just a minor nuisance – it can seriously undermine a student's concentration, sleep, and ultimately their exam performance. In fact, a 2007 study in the UK found that teenagers with hay fever symptoms were **40% more likely to drop a grade between their mock and final GCSE exams**, and that risk shot up to 70% if they were taking sedating antihistamine medication. Clearly, hay fever during exam season is a real problem.

The good news is that effective long-term solutions exist. In this post, we'll explore how hay fever affects students, why conventional allergy medications might not be enough (and can even backfire), and how **allergy immunotherapy** – a treatment offered by **AllergyRhino** in partnership with leading NHS allergy experts – can help your child breathe easy and perform their best. We'll also discuss AllergyRhino's personalised

approach to allergy care, backed by Professors Adam Fox and Stephen Till, and how it could make a life-changing difference for your family.

Hay Fever and Exam Performance: A Real Concern

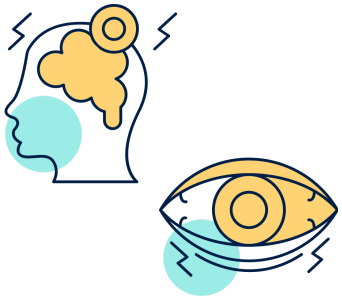


Every spring and early summer, the UK's exam timetable collides with peak pollen season. GCSE exams typically run from mid-May through June, which unfortunately coincides with the height of grass pollen release. It's no surprise, then, that so many students struggle with hay fever exactly when they need to be at the top of their game academically. Hay fever (seasonal allergic rhinitis) is extremely common in adolescence – one survey found that as many as **63% of students** reported hay fever symptoms during exam time. For students already prone to allergies, this seasonal onslaught can turn exam halls into a battleground of sneezes and sniffles.

What's truly alarming is the measurable impact on exam results. The **Guardian** reported on a large study of 1,834 UK teenagers which was the first to look at real exam performance in hay fever sufferers. The findings confirmed what many parents and teachers have long suspected: hay fever can knock down students' grades. Those with active hay fever symptoms on exam days were significantly more likely to underperform relative to their mock exams. As mentioned earlier, having hay fever on the day made students 40% more likely to drop at least one grade, and if the student had also taken a first-generation (sedating) antihistamine, the odds of a drop in grades increased to 1.7 times (about 70% higher) compared to non-sufferers. In other words, a teen with poorly controlled hay fever could go from an expected **A** to a **B** purely because of their allergy symptoms – a difference that can affect sixth-form college entry or university prospects down the line.

These statistics highlight that hay fever is far from a trivial issue during exams. Educators and health experts have raised concerns that the current exam schedule unintentionally disadvantages students with allergies. While we can't change the pollen seasons, we *can* do more to help allergic students be symptom-free when it matters most. That starts with understanding how hay fever impairs concentration and what kinds of treatments can truly make a difference.

When Hay Fever Strikes: Concentration and Sleep Suffer



If your son or daughter has hay fever, you've likely seen how the symptoms can make them absolutely miserable in the run-up to exams. The constant sneezing, blocked nose, and itchy eyes aren't just uncomfortable – they actively **disrupt concentration**. Imagine trying to write an essay or solve math problems while fighting the urge to rub your eyes or blow your nose every other minute. It's no wonder that students with allergies report feeling less focused and more fatigued during peak pollen days. Research confirms that hay fever symptoms can impair learning ability and memory in children. In the classroom or exam hall, a congested student may have trouble processing information and staying alert. Allergy symptoms often flare in the early morning as pollen counts rise, so a student might walk into a morning exam already drained by a sneezing fit on the way to school.

Sleep disturbance is another hidden way hay fever drags students down. Severe nasal congestion at night can lead to poor sleep quality or insomnia, leaving your child exhausted the next day. According to Allergy UK, even if a student isn't sneezing in the exam itself, a night of allergy-induced sleeplessness can knock their performance sideways. We all know how vital good rest is before a big test – hay fever can rob students of that crucial restorative sleep before exam day.

Parents should also be aware of the toll hay fever can take on a child's mood and energy levels. Persistent allergy symptoms can make kids irritable, weary, and unmotivated. Over a weeks-long exam period, this can accumulate into significant stress and anxiety. It's heartbreaking to watch a child put in the hard work studying, only to be hampered by factors beyond their control. That's why managing hay fever

effectively during exam season is so important. Minimising symptoms means your child can get decent sleep, go into exams feeling clear-headed, and fully show their abilities.

Sedating Antihistamines: A Double-Edged Sword

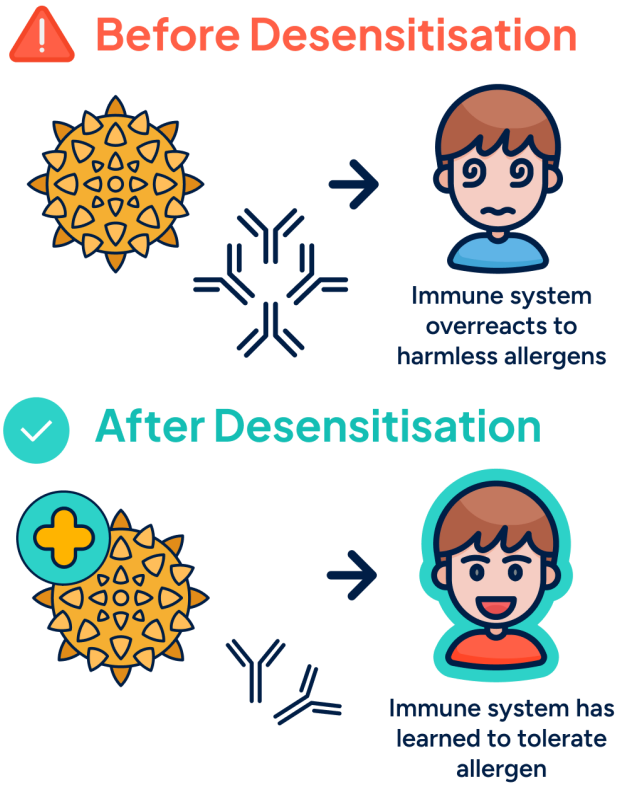
When dealing with hay fever, many families reach for over-the-counter antihistamine tablets or syrups – the typical allergy meds. Antihistamines can be very helpful at relieving sneezing and itching. But it's critical to choose the **right kind** of antihistamine, especially during exam time. Some of the older, first-generation antihistamines (such as chlorpheniramine, known by the Piriton brand in the UK) are **sedating**. These drugs readily cross into the brain and can cause drowsiness. In the context of exams, that side effect can be devastating. The 2007 study found that a significant portion – **28% – of students taking medication for hay fever were using a sedating antihistamine**, despite guidelines recommending non-sedating treatments. Perhaps these were medications left over in the medicine cabinet or simply chosen without realizing the impact. Unfortunately, the result is that some students are essentially *medicating themselves into a fog* on exam day.

Sedating antihistamines don't just make kids sleepy; they also blunt their mental sharpness. Researchers note that these medications can impair attention span, working memory, vigilance, and processing speed. In practical terms, a drowsy student might struggle to recall facts, take longer to understand exam questions, or even accidentally skip parts of the test due to lapses in focus. One charity described the effect as causing **higher levels of fatigue and lower levels of motivation and activity in sufferers**. This is the last thing any parent wants for their child during a high-stakes exam.

If your child *must* take an antihistamine during exams, opt for a **newer non-sedating antihistamine** (like cetirizine, loratadine, or fexofenadine) which are much less likely to cause drowsiness. Even then, every individual responds differently, so it's wise for students to trial any medication on a non-exam day to see how they feel. And keep in mind that antihistamines alone may not completely eliminate severe hay fever symptoms; they often need to be combined with a nasal steroid spray and eye drops for better relief. Managing hay fever with medicines can start to feel like a juggling act of pills and sprays, timed precisely to avoid peak drowsiness during exams.

So, is there a better way to help allergic students **without compromising their alertness** or relying on multiple medications? This is where **allergy immunotherapy** comes in – an approach that addresses the root cause of hay fever rather than just masking symptoms. Immunotherapy could be the key to freeing your child from both allergy misery *and* medication side effects during exam season.

Allergy Immunotherapy: A Long-Term Solution to Hay Fever



Allergy immunotherapy, also known as **desensitisation therapy**, is a form of treatment that works almost like a vaccine against allergens. Instead of temporarily blocking allergy symptoms (as antihistamines do), immunotherapy **re-trains the immune system** to be less sensitive to the allergens (like pollen) that trigger hay fever. Over time, this can dramatically reduce or even eliminate the allergic reaction.

How does it work? The process involves giving the patient controlled, very small doses of the allergen regularly, and gradually increasing the exposure. These doses stimulate the immune system in a special way: the body starts to build up tolerance to the allergen.

After a sufficient treatment period, the immune system reacts much less aggressively to real-world exposures like a field full of grass pollen. Think of it as **building immunity** or "making peace" with the allergen – your child's body learns that pollen doesn't have to be an enemy.

Immunotherapy is typically administered in two ways: by **injections (shots) or sublingual (under-the-tongue) drops/tablets**. Historically, injection immunotherapy was the standard and has been used for decades for severe hay fever. It's effective but requires frequent clinic visits and carries a small risk of serious allergic reactions, so in the UK it's usually done under specialist supervision only. In recent years, however, sublingual immunotherapy (abbreviated SLIT) has become a game-changer. SLIT involves putting allergen extracts under the tongue (as drops or rapidly dissolving tablets) daily. This method has been shown to be **safe and effective** for hay fever, without the need for injections. It's much more convenient – after the initial setup, patients can take the treatment at home, which is great for busy students.

One landmark clinical trial published in 2006 tested a daily grass pollen tablet (known as Grazax) versus placebo in hundreds of patients with hay fever. The results were very encouraging: the immunotherapy tablet **reduced hay fever symptoms by 30%** on average and cut the need for additional allergy medication by 38% compared to placebo. Importantly, the treatment was **well tolerated** – the most common side effects were mild itching or tingling in the mouth, which usually faded as patients got used to the therapy. There were no serious reactions in that study, confirming the **safety of sublingual immunotherapy** in a large group. The conclusion from the researchers was clear: sublingual immunotherapy provided significant relief from grass pollen hay fever and had a favourable safety profile.

Another huge advantage of immunotherapy is its **lasting benefits**.

Unlike taking antihistamines, which only help for a few hours at a time, a full course of immunotherapy can lead to years of relief even after stopping the treatment. Pioneering research by Professor Stephen Durham and colleagues demonstrated that after **3–4 years of immunotherapy**, patients remained in remission from hay fever for an extended period. In that study, people who had undergone immunotherapy continued to have very low symptom scores and minimal need for allergy medications for at least **three years after finishing** the treatment, whereas patients who never received immunotherapy still had severe seasonal symptoms. This provides strong evidence that immunotherapy isn't just controlling symptoms – it's **changing the course of the disease**. An editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* even noted that this was the best evidence to date that allergen immunotherapy has long-term, perhaps *permanent*, benefits.

For a child in Year 10 or 11 struggling with hay fever, immunotherapy could mean their Year 12 and 13 springs (A-level prep time) are significantly easier, not to mention the relief they'd continue to feel into university years. There is also some evidence that treating allergic rhinitis with immunotherapy in children may reduce the risk of developing asthma later on. From a parent's perspective, immunotherapy is an investment in your child's health and educational success for years to come.

Why Immunotherapy Instead of Just Antihistamines?

You might wonder, if antihistamines and nasal sprays can be bought cheaply at any pharmacy, why go through a longer-term immunotherapy program? The key difference is **immunotherapy addresses the root cause** of hay fever, whereas medications only suppress symptoms temporarily. Over-the-counter medicines might get your child through an afternoon exam, but they won't make the immune system calmer next year

when pollen flies again. Immunotherapy modifies the immune response itself, potentially **reducing the severity of allergies in the long run**. Studies show that approaches like sublingual immunotherapy can provide **decades of relief** by training the immune system, as opposed to just offering a quick fix. And as mentioned, immunotherapy's benefits can persist even after treatment stops, whereas medications stop working the moment you stop taking them.

Another factor is quality of life. Taking multiple pills, sprays, and eye drops every day for weeks (and dealing with their side effects) can be burdensome. Some teens also experience "brain fog" or just don't feel like themselves on high doses of allergy meds. Immunotherapy, after the initial buildup phase, generally becomes a routine that the body adjusts to, with minimal ongoing side effects. It **simplifies life**: instead of reacting to allergies with a pile of drugs, your child's body will be proactively resisting the allergens on its own.

That said, immunotherapy is not an overnight cure. It requires patience and commitment, usually over 2–3 years of continuous treatment for full effect. Ideally, one should start immunotherapy **months before the exam season** (often treatment is initiated in the autumn or winter, well ahead of spring pollen). Many families plan to begin immunotherapy in the years leading up to GCSEs or A-levels so that by the time these critical exams arrive, the student's hay fever is well controlled. If your child is a few months away from exams right now, they'll still need conventional medications for this season, but it's worth exploring immunotherapy as a longer-term strategy to prevent the same struggle next year.

AllergyRhino: Expert Allergy Care Backed by the NHS

Embarking on immunotherapy might sound daunting – it used to mean frequent hospital appointments and specialist referrals. This is where **AllergyRhino** can make a tremendous difference for you and your child. **AllergyRhino was founded in collaboration with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital (GSTT)** – one of the UK's leading NHS trusts – blending top-tier clinical expertise with modern digital convenience. The company is led by two of Britain's foremost allergy experts: **Professor Adam Fox** and **Professor Stephen Till**. Prof. Fox is a Professor of Paediatric Allergy at Guy's & St Thomas' and a past President of the British Society for Allergy & Clinical Immunology, with decades of experience helping children overcome allergies. Prof. Till is a Professor of Allergy (Adult Allergy) at the same renowned institution, a researcher with 20+ years of work in immunotherapy, and a recipient of the World Allergy Organization's award for research in allergy. In short, the people behind AllergyRhino are the same specialists who train NHS allergy doctors and run hospital allergy clinics – you could not be in better hands.

AllergyRhino's partnership with GSTT and other trusted institutions means they adhere to the highest clinical standards. The treatments offered are **evidence-based and approved**, including the very immunotherapy solutions we've discussed. (For example, grass pollen tablets like **Grazax** are part of the immunotherapy plans, and these are medications that have been tested in clinical trials and are even used in NHS allergy services) By partnering directly with an NHS foundation trust, AllergyRhino bridges the gap between hospital-level care and an accessible, consumer-friendly service . This is especially valuable for busy parents and students – instead of multiple hospital visits, you can get expert guidance largely through virtual consultations and home-based treatments.

Crucially, **AllergyRhino is focused on personalisation and convenience** without compromising safety. Their team includes NHS-trained GPs and allergy nurses who understand both the medical and practical aspects of managing allergies. They oversee the process so that families are supported every step of the way, from initial assessment to treatment and follow-up.

Personalised Treatment Plans: Data-Driven Allergy Relief

One size does *not* fit all when it comes to allergies. AllergyRhino recognises this and emphasises **deep personalisation** of treatment for each patient. What does this mean in practice? First, it means **getting the full picture of your child's allergies**. AllergyRhino offers advanced testing options, including at-home or in-clinic **IgE blood tests** that measure exactly what your child is allergic to and how strongly. These blood tests provide precise data on allergen-specific IgE levels – essentially a map of your child's allergic triggers. For example, the tests can confirm if it's grass pollen, tree pollen, dust mites, or a combination that's causing the problem. This is vital, because targeting the wrong allergen would waste time (for instance, there's no point in desensitising to grass if birch pollen is the real culprit). As Professor Stephen Till explains, a thorough evaluation ensures they identify the true triggers and confirm that immunotherapy is appropriate.

After pinpointing the allergens, AllergyRhino's specialists design a **personalised treatment plan** tailored to your child's needs and lifestyle. If immunotherapy is recommended, they'll choose the right formulation (e.g., a grass pollen tablet or a mix of pollen drops) based on your child's specific sensitivities. They also consider factors like the severity of symptoms, any co-existing asthma, and scheduling to make sure the plan is safe and effective. The goal is to optimize the therapy so that it yields maximum benefit – meaning your child gets through pollen season with minimal symptoms and minimal stress.

Another aspect of personalisation is **ongoing monitoring and support**. Hay fever can vary from year to year or month to month, so AllergyRhino doesn't just hand over a treatment and disappear. They actively **track your child's symptom improvements throughout the treatment course**, using regular check-ins and digital symptom diaries. For example, you and your child might be asked to report how their nose and eyes are feeling on a simple scale each week during pollen season. This data lets the care team see the progress in real time. If the reports show that symptoms are still flaring, the clinicians can adjust the plan – maybe by tweaking the dose, adding a short-term supportive medication, or checking if a new allergen has become an issue. The treatment plan **evolves with your child's needs**, which is the beauty of a data-driven approach. It's not a static "one and done" prescription, but a responsive regimen that can be fine-tuned for best results.

Throughout this journey, AllergyRhino provides **continuous guidance and education**. Parents and students receive expert tips (for instance, reminders about starting medications a bit before pollen season, or advice on environmental controls like using air purifiers in the study room). The team is available to answer questions – whether it's about a certain side effect or how to coordinate immunotherapy with school schedules. This kind of support can be a huge relief for parents who previously felt on their own managing their child's allergies.

Helping Your Child Thrive: Next Steps with AllergyRhino

Hay fever might be common, but that doesn't mean your child has to simply "tough it out" each exam season. As we've discussed, poorly controlled allergies can derail months of hard work by impairing concentration, disrupting sleep, and even dragging down exam scores. However, with the right approach – especially **preventative treatment like immunotherapy** – your child can face exam season with clear

eyes, a clear nose, and a clear mind. Imagine them sitting for GCSEs in May and June without a tissue box by their side, free from the haze of drowsy medicine, performing up to their true potential. That outcome is possible with proper allergy care.

If you're concerned about your child's hay fever and its impact on their schooling, it's wise to start exploring solutions well **before** the next exam cycle. Allergy immunotherapy, in particular, is most effective when started at least 3–6 months prior to pollen season, so a good time to begin is in the autumn or winter term. **AllergyRhino** makes it easier than ever to take that step. You can begin with a free online allergy assessment quiz to gauge how severe your child's symptoms are and what allergens might be at play. From there, consider scheduling a consultation with AllergyRhino's specialists – they even offer initial **free consultations** to discuss your child's case and advise on testing and treatment options (this can often be done via video call, so it's very convenient).

During the process, you might choose one of AllergyRhino's at-home allergy **testing kits** to pinpoint triggers. Once results are in, you'll get a detailed explanation and a proposed treatment plan tailored to your child. This could include immunotherapy drops or tablets delivered to your home, along with any supportive medications (like nasal sprays) if needed for the short term. The team will guide you on how and when your child should take these treatments for best effect. AllergyRhino's approach is **holistic** – meaning they look at all aspects of managing hay fever, from environmental controls to emergency plans, in addition to the immunotherapy itself.

Call to Action: Don't let hay fever hold your child back from achieving their best. With the right help, your teen can turn exam season from an allergy-addled ordeal into a period of confidence and success. Visit **AllergyRhino** to learn more about allergy testing and personalised immunotherapy treatment for hay fever. Our expert team – backed by NHS allergy consultants – is ready to answer your questions and support your family through every step. Help your child break free from allergy symptoms and

reach their full potential. **Get started today** by contacting AllergyRhino for a consultation or exploring our online resources on allergy care. With early intervention and a tailored plan, you can ensure hay fever is one less worry when exam time comes around next year. Here's to clear skies, clear noses, and acing those exams!

Sources:

- Walker et al., *J. Allergy Clin. Immunol.* (2007) – Seasonal allergic rhinitis significantly increases the risk of dropping a grade in exams .
- *The Guardian* (13 June 2007) – *"Hay fever impairs exam performance, study finds"* .
- Education for Health – Guidelines caution against sedating antihistamines due to effects on concentration and fatigue .
- Durham et al. (1999) – 3–4 years of grass pollen immunotherapy induces prolonged remission of hay fever symptoms .
- Durham et al. (2006) – Sublingual immunotherapy for grass pollen reduced symptoms ~30% and was well-tolerated in a large RCT .
- AllergyRhino – Company founded in collaboration with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust; led by Prof. Adam Fox and Prof. Stephen Till . Personalised care includes IgE blood testing and tracking symptom improvements to tailor treatment.