- Allergy

Get a head start to beat hay fever

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Improving gut health by tucking into fibre-filled food such as beans, pulses and wholegrains can improve the way the body reacts to pollen. Studies suggest that when gut microbes break down fibre they produce short-chain fatty acids that can regulate the way 'mast cells' work. These are the cells that release histamine, the chemical that causes hay fever symptoms.



"Allergies are a sign of inflammation and generalised immune dysregulation," explains Dr Macciochi in her book Blueprint for Strong Immunity (£14.99, Yellow Kite). "Ensuring good gut health and following an anti-inflammatory diet pattern are fundamental."

She advises cutting down on inflammatory pastries, cakes, biscuits, fast food, sweet treats and fizzy drinks, and suggests eating 30 different plant foods a week to ensure you meet the recommended minimum fibre intake of 30g a day.

AN APPLE A DAY

It seems consuming a potent antioxidant found in apples, onions, capers, peppers, leafy greens and berries could improve hay fever symptoms. Quercetin, which can prevent mast cells from releasing histamine, is "considered one of the best food-based anti-allergy agents," says Dr Macciochi.

She says a typical diet provides up to 30mg of

W e s t ern quercetin a day but we can boost it by consuming cherries, spring onions, tomatoes, broccoli, brussels sprouts, asparagus and black tea. It can also be taken as a supplement.

"Its anti-allergy effects are typically seen in doses of 1,000mg,

twice a day," she says.

PRE-MEDICATE

Waiting until your hay fever symptoms kick in before taking medication could be too late, warns allergy consultant Dr Adrian Morris, who is medical director of the Surrey Allergy Clinic.

"Keep an eye on the pollen counts and when they begin to rise, take a once-a-day antihistamine," he says.

"The evidence suggests that if you take it daily through the season you fare much better and need less medication, so don't wait until you're symptomatic.

"If you miss that early window, you could end up chasing the symptoms."

He recommends a raft of nonsedating antihistamines including levocetirizine, desloratadine and fexofenadine, which are available on prescription.

Buying the right equipment now will make the worst days of summer more bearable.

First on your shopping list? A nasal filter. This sits over the openings of both nostrils providing a physical barrier between your body and pollen grains.

Nasal filters are available from online pharmacies and Amazon.

"Wraparound sunglasses will also reduce the amount of pollen getting into your eyes," says

Dr Morris. "When you get home, shower and wash your hair, otherwise you'll go to bed with pollen grains on your skin and hair."

HEAVY ON THE LOCAL HONEY

If you live in an area where honey is produced, it's time to stock up.

"Some people swear by a teaspoonful of local honey a day," says Dr Morris. "There is pollen in the honey and you de-sensitise yourself by taking in small amounts.

"Begin a couple of months before the season starts."

But Dr Morris adds: "There's no scientific evidence that it works but there's no harm in it."

GO POTTY FOR PINEAPPLE

Pineapple is more than controversial pizza topping – could be your secret weapon against pollen.

Dr Macciochi says: "Bromelain, an enzyme from pineapple, has been shown to relieve hay fever or sinusitis in several human clinical studies by working as a natural antihistamine, anti-inflammatory and decongestant."

Bromelain is also thought to enhance the beneficial effects of quercetin by absorption.

BUG OUT

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Start taking the right 'good' bacteria now to give your body the best chance against pollen in a month's time.

"There is some interesting research coming out on the preventative and therapeutic role that probiotics can play," says Dr Macciochi.

"Supporting gut health is the top priority in managing histamine intolerance. Re-balancing the gut microflora and improving gut integrity is a key step to doing this."

Keep an eye out for particular strains when you buy a bottle of probiotic supplements, she says.

"The following have been shown to have immune-regulatory properties that may help in the prevention and treatment of allergies: Lactobacillus paracasei LP-33, Lactobacillus rhamnosus HN001,42 and Lactobacillus acidophilus NCFM."

Quite the mouthful, but worth knowing in the battle against hay fever.