



Disclaimer: This leaflet provides general information and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional for any health concerns or before making any decisions related to your health or treatment.

Overview

Rhinitis is a common condition characterized by inflammation of the nasal lining (mucous membranes). This inflammation can lead to a variety of uncomfortable symptoms, including a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, and itching. Rhinitis can be triggered by various factors, such as allergies, infections, irritants, or even certain medications. It can be either acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term), depending on the underlying cause and duration of symptoms.

Symptoms and Causes

Symptoms

The symptoms of rhinitis can vary depending on the underlying cause, but some common signs include:

- **Nasal congestion:** A stuffy or blocked nose is a hallmark symptom.
- **Runny nose (rhinorrhoea):** This can manifest as a clear, watery discharge or a thicker, coloured mucus.
- **Sneezing:** Frequent sneezing, especially in bursts, is common in allergic rhinitis.
- **Itching:** Itching in the nose, eyes, throat, or ears can be a significant symptom, particularly in allergic rhinitis.
- **Postnasal drip:** The sensation of mucus dripping down the back of the throat can be irritating.
- **Headache:** Pressure or pain in the forehead or around the eyes may occur due to sinus congestion.
- **Facial pressure or fullness:** This can be due to inflammation and blockage of the sinuses.
- **Reduced sense of smell:** Nasal congestion can impair the ability to smell properly.
- **Sore throat:** Postnasal drip can irritate the throat, leading to soreness.
- **Cough:** Persistent coughing may be triggered by postnasal drip or irritation of the airways.

In children, additional symptoms may include irritability, snoring, mouth breathing, and feeding difficulties.

Causes

Several factors can trigger or contribute to rhinitis:

- **Allergies (allergic rhinitis):** Allergies are a common cause, triggered by exposure to allergens such as pollen, dust mites, pet dander, or mold. Allergic rhinitis can be seasonal (hay fever) or perennial (year-round).
- **Infections (viral or bacterial):** Viral infections, such as the common cold, are the most frequent cause of acute rhinitis. Bacterial infections can also cause sinusitis, which can mimic or complicate rhinitis.
- **Irritants (non-allergic rhinitis):** Irritants like smoke, dust, chemicals, perfumes, or changes in temperature or humidity can trigger non-allergic rhinitis.
- **Medications:** Certain medications, such as aspirin, ibuprofen, some blood pressure medications (beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors), and some antidepressants, can cause rhinitis as a side effect.
- **Other factors:** Hormonal changes (pregnancy, puberty), structural abnormalities in the nose (deviated septum, nasal polyps), and certain medical conditions (cystic fibrosis, immune system disorders) can also contribute to rhinitis.

Diagnosis and Investigations

Diagnosis

Diagnosing rhinitis typically involves a physical examination of the nose and a review of your medical history and symptoms. Your doctor may also perform a nasal endoscopy, a procedure where a thin, lighted tube with a camera is inserted into your nose to visualize the nasal passages and sinuses. Allergy testing may be recommended if allergic rhinitis is suspected. This can involve skin prick tests or blood tests to identify specific allergens.

Investigations

In some cases, further investigations may be needed to determine the underlying cause or rule out other conditions:

- **Imaging studies:** CT scans or MRI scans of the sinuses may be helpful in evaluating chronic sinusitis or other structural abnormalities.
- **Nasal cytology:** Examining a sample of nasal mucus under a microscope can help identify the presence of inflammation or infection.
- **Blood tests:** Blood tests can rule out other conditions, such as infections or hormonal imbalances.

Management and Treatment

The treatment for rhinitis depends on the underlying cause and the severity of symptoms:

- **Allergic rhinitis:** Avoiding allergens, nasal saline irrigation, and medications such as antihistamines, nasal corticosteroids, and decongestants can help manage symptoms.
- **Non-allergic rhinitis:** Identifying and avoiding irritants is crucial. Nasal saline irrigation and medications like nasal corticosteroids or anticholinergic nasal sprays can also be beneficial.
- **Infectious rhinitis:** Rest, fluids, and over-the-counter pain relievers can help alleviate symptoms. Antibiotics may be necessary if a bacterial infection is present.
- **Medication-induced rhinitis:** If a medication is suspected to be the cause, your doctor may recommend switching to a different medication or adjusting the dosage.

Prevention

- **Allergen avoidance:** Identify and avoid triggers, especially during high pollen seasons. This might involve using air conditioning, keeping windows closed, and wearing a mask outdoors.
- **Nasal saline irrigation:** Rinsing the nasal passages regularly with saline solution can help remove irritants and allergens.
- **Healthy lifestyle:** A balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep can support a healthy immune system.
- **Smoking cessation:** Avoid smoking, as it can exacerbate sinus infections.

Outlook / Prognosis

The outlook for rhinitis varies depending on the cause and individual response to treatment.

- **Acute rhinitis:** Typically resolves within a few weeks.
- **Allergic rhinitis:** Can be a chronic condition but usually responds well to medication and allergen avoidance.
- **Non-allergic rhinitis:** Management focuses on avoiding triggers.