

In hay-fever hell?

One in five of you will be, so here's our guide to surviving summer...

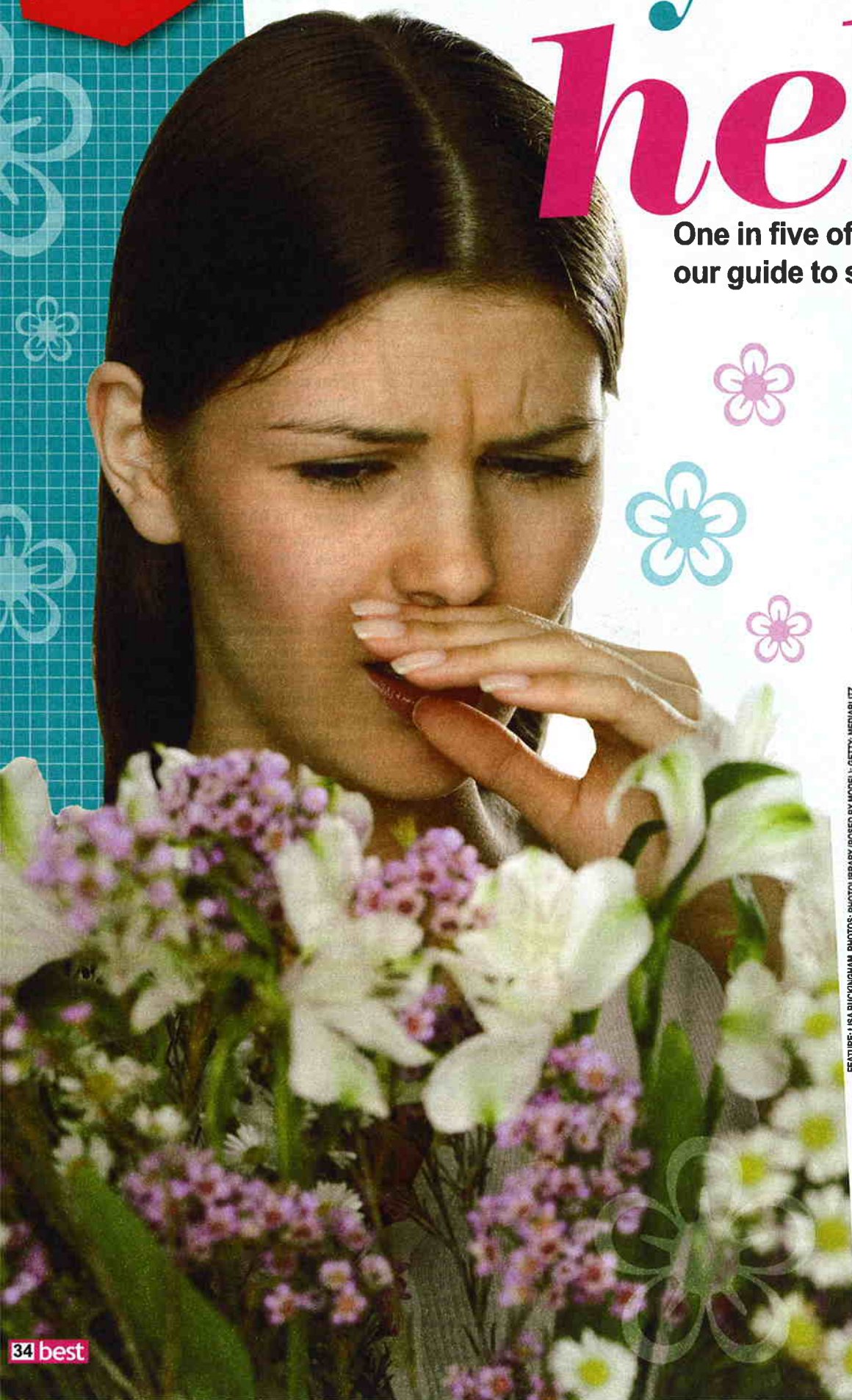
Hay-fever sufferers will know it's often not just a case of the occasional sneezing fit, but months of streaming eyes and nose, itchy ears, eyes and throat, nasal congestion and even breathing problems. In fact, 78 per cent said it's so bad, it impacts on their quality of life, according to a survey by Kleenex.

Hay fever can hit people at different times, depending on what kind of pollen you're allergic to. Tree pollens come first (as early as March), then grass pollens (the most common type of allergy) in May, peaking in July, followed by weeds and moulds.

"Symptoms are often not taken seriously, but they should be," says John Collard, clinical director of Allergy UK. "If they are not controlled, it raises your risk of developing asthma threefold. Also, if you have asthma, controlling hay-fever symptoms can help improve your asthma."

Here's a round-up of the best hay-fever treatments and how they can help control your

FEATURE: LISA BUCKINGHAM. PHOTOS: PHOTOLIBRARY (POSED BY MODEL); GETTY; MEDIALITYZ



symptoms, including the latest additions to the market...

ANTIHISTAMINES

The secret to success is to start taking these before hay-fever season begins, and continue throughout the season, not just when you get symptoms.

"They're safe and there's no reason not to take them for long periods," says John. Over-the-counter antihistamines help with most symptoms, but tend not to ease nasal congestion. "If symptoms are severe, combine them with a nasal spray," says John.

Older antihistamines, such as **chlorphenamine** found in **Piriton**, can cause drowsiness, but newer ones, like **loratadine** found in **Clarityn**, and **cetirizine** found in **Zirtek** are non-drowsy for most people. The fastest-acting ingredient, **acrivastine**, is found in **Benadryl Allergy Relief**.

"Experiment with different types to see which works for you - one might not, when the next does," says Collard.

Look at the active ingredient in your preferred branded antihistamine

and buy the generic version from your pharmacy instead, which will be cheaper and just as effective. Check the non-active ingredients of the generic version, in case you're allergic to any.

NASAL SPRAYS

Most nasal corticosteroid sprays are available over the counter and can work well on all symptoms.

"Long-term use

of some types, like fluticasone and budesonide, are better, as they're absorbed less into the bloodstream," says John.

IMMUNOTHERAPY

These treatments are for grass pollen allergies and are thought to stimulate your immune system to produce antibodies against grass pollen.

GRAZAX TABLETS

They're only available on prescription for people who can't manage their symptoms with other treatments, and you would need to have your allergy type confirmed with a test at an allergy clinic. To have the greatest effect, tablets should be started four months before the grass pollen season starts (so a bit late for this year) and ideally be taken continuously for three years. 2009 saw the launch of **Grazax** for children aged 5-17.

"Unfortunately, many Primary Care Trusts do not fund **Grazax**, as it can be a lengthy and expensive treatment, but ask your GP," says John.

INJECTIONS

"**Pollinex** is usually used," says John. "It's a long course of injections, but is pretty effective." It's only administered by specialists at allergy clinics, so you'd need to be referred by your GP if your allergies are a serious problem.

POLLINEX QUATTRO

Promising results have been shown for a vaccine called **Pollinex Quattro**. Once the clinical studies are complete, it could be available here by 2010. It involves an injection once a week for one month, and there's a possibility that it would permanently cure hay fever and not need to be repeated.

"This vaccine is an exciting development, as it would be cost-effective and have a more rapid result," says John.

PHOTOTHERAPY

Using phototherapy (light therapy), a gadget called **Medinose** can help inhibit the release of histamine. You place



such as **Boots Hay Fever Relief Eye Drops**, £4.69.

AVOIDANCE TACTICS

Limit your exposure to pollen. When you go indoors, change your clothing, as pollen will have settled on it. Also, keep windows closed and don't hang washing out when the pollen count is high. Wear wraparound sunglasses to prevent pollen getting in your eyes. See www.pollenuk.co.uk for your local pollen count.

TRAP THE POLLEN

Smearing the entrances to your nostrils with **HayMax** can trap pollen and stop it going up your nose. It doesn't melt in the heat and is non-greasy. Priced £6.80, it's available from pharmacies and supermarkets. Or try the **Nasal AirGuard**, which fits up your nose to filter out pollen (www.nasalairguard.com). If any pollen does make it up there, try **NeilMed SinuRinse**, a saline solution that flushes out allergens (£13.75; www.neilmed.com/uk).

EATING LOCAL HONEY

Evidence is anecdotal, but thousands swear by this. The theory is that having a little of what you're allergic to builds up immunity (don't try this if you have very severe allergies). See www.beedata.com/localhoney.

● For more information, visit Allergy UK at www.allergyuk.org or tel: 01322 619898.

two light diodes up your nose for 4½ minutes, two to three times a day. A study at Tel Aviv University found that 72 per cent of people reported a reduction in symptoms, compared to 24 per cent using a placebo. Suitable for children and in pregnancy, it costs £79.95 (with money-back guarantee if not satisfied); www.anhealth.co.uk or tel: 0870 350 1264.

BUTTERBUR

A study in the *British Medical Journal* found the herbal remedy butterbur is as effective as a traditional antihistamine, but with no sedative effects. It's not suitable during pregnancy or for children. Try **Linpharma Butterbur Petasin**, £19.95; www.revital.co.uk.

EYE DROPS

Itchy, watery eyes can be given some relief with drops that contain sodium chromoglycate,

CASE STUDY

'MY HAY FEVER WAS SO BAD IT LED TO CHRONIC SINUSITIS'

Vicki McNamara, 38, from Dumfries, finally found relief from her hay fever...

"I've always had mild hay fever, but four years ago it got much worse. I would get so blocked up that it led to chronic sinusitis, and I had constant headaches, sneezing, burning eyes and coughing. My symptoms became unbearable and my GP referred me to an ear, nose and throat specialist.

The specialist recommended an operation to clear and widen my sinuses, which helped me breathe more easily. He then prescribed a sinus wash called NeilMed SinuRinse and an antihistamine once a day, all year round. My symptoms are now under control and I can finally enjoy being outside again. As soon as I feel a tickle, I rinse my nose with the wash and it stops the symptoms in their tracks."



With so many medications now available, there's no reason to suffer

