



The risks of driving with hay fever

With the summer season bringing a rise in pollen counts, read our guide to help you understand the risks of driving with hay fever symptoms and how it could be affecting your driving performance.

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- About 20% of UK residents suffer from hay fever, with an estimated 95% of them allergic to grass pollen.
- But before you reach for stronger medication to counteract hay fever symptoms this summer, it's vital to consider how this could affect your driving performance.
- If you suffer from hay fever and wish to drive, your allergy can cause several problems. Firstly, some of the symptoms of hay fever such as sneezing fits, itchy eyes and runny nose can make driving more difficult by impairing your vision or distracting you. Sneezing fits can be especially problematic when you're driving at high speeds.
- To overcome these symptoms, many drivers take common, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs such as antihistamines. But, these OTC drugs used to fight hay fever can cause side-effects that impair your ability to drive safely, such as drowsiness and vision impairment.
- It's important to remember that both prescribed and OTC drugs are subject to the same drug-driving laws that cover illegal substances. Driving under the influence of antihistamines could carry the risk of a fine or a ban if it impairs your driving abilities.
- If the police believe you're under the influence of drugs, you'll be stopped and may be asked to perform a 'field impairment assessment', which includes exercises such as walking in a straight line. In addition to this, a roadside drug kit may be administered.
- Penalties for a drug-driving conviction include an unlimited fine, a minimum of a one-year ban on driving, a prison sentence of up to six months and a criminal record.
- For drivers suffering from hay fever, an alternative solution could be to use OTC drugs that contain cetirizine or loratadine, as they are less likely to cause drowsiness and impair driving ability.
- If in doubt, drivers are advised to speak to their doctor or pharmacist for clarity on the potential side-effects of any medication they are taking.

