Hay fever suffers are more likely to have allergic reactions to fruit and veg, according to new research commissioned for National Allergy Week.

It’s not just airborne pollen that’s set to make allergy sufferers’ lives a misery this spring. If you experience hay fever, you’re more likely to suffer from a similar, less well known, allergic reaction called Oral Allergy Syndrome. It’s caused by your body mistaking proteins in your food for the same pollens that make you all sniffly, and reacting against them too.

As many as 40 per cent of hay fever sufferers are thought to be at risk of allergic reactions to foods with similar properties to tree and grass pollen. And surprisingly, the foods containing these are some of our healthiest diet choices. Fruit, vegetables, nuts and spices can all be culprits.

The good news, according to Lindsey McManus from Allergy UK, is that this allergic reaction is similar to most people’s experience of hay fever - annoying but not particularly serious. It’s not the same thing as food intolerance and if you experience a serious allergic reaction to these foods, it’s probably not Oral Allergy Syndrome. “It’s worth being aware of the symptoms, but we definitely aren’t suggesting anyone cuts some of these great food groups from their diet as there are plenty of ways you can reduce their effect so you still get all the benefits.”

Symptoms and treatment

Oral Allergy Syndrome usually manifests in your mouth, throat and sometimes lips, as a tingling, swelling or itching. Generally it will go away on its own in around half an hour and rinsing your mouth with cold water or drinking a warm drink often does the trick. If you’re still feeling itchy, try an antihistamine. If you’re very allergic, swelling can be more serious and if it affects your breathing, call an ambulance immediately. This is rare and suggests you have something more serious that Oral Allergy Syndrome. If you have an epi-pen, use it as necessary.

Foods

The worst offenders are apples, peaches, pears, cherries, carrots, raw tomatoes, melons, and celery. Nuts, particularly hazelnut, can also be the cause as can some spices such as coriander and cumin.

Prevention

You can reduce the chance of reacting to foods by cooking them so heat breaks down the proteins. Or try leaving the food for ten minutes after chopping it up.