

WHAT IS AN ALLERGIC REACTION?

An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system reacts to a normally harmless substance. An allergic person's immune system considers these substances to be potentially damaging and releases histamine to defend the body against them. This causes certain changes in the body, which may produce a variety of mild to severe symptoms. This allergic response can develop after exposure by skin contact, swallowing or inhalation (breathing in).

Anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock is a condition where the body's immune system severely over-reacts to something. This results in an acute, severe, potentially (but rarely) fatal allergic reaction, which needs immediate medical attention.

COMMON ALLERGIES

Substances that cause allergic reactions are called allergens. The more common allergens include:

- **Grass and tree pollen** – an allergy to these is known as **hay fever** (allergic rhinitis).
- **Dust mites & animal dander** (tiny flakes of skin or hair).
- **Food** – particularly nuts, fruit, shellfish, eggs and cow's milk.
- **Insect bites and stings.**
- **Medication** – including aspirin, and certain antibiotics.
- **Latex** – used to make some gloves and condoms.
- **Mould** – these can release small particles into the air that you can breathe in.
- **Household chemicals** – including those in detergents and hair dyes.

Most of these allergens are generally harmless to people who aren't allergic to them.

Getting Further Advice & Support

Please feel free to return to one of our Medical Treatment Centres whilst the event is on-going if you have any concerns or questions.

Following the event, you should seek further advice (if needed) from your GP or local walk in centre, Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) or hospital Emergency Department (ED). You can also get free non-emergency advice by calling NHS 111.

We are unable to give health or other advice over the phone.

In an Emergency call 999 for an Ambulance



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MILD ALLERGIC REACTIONS

Patient Information Leaflet

This leaflet contains important information about the treatment you have received and what to do and what to expect next.

Please take the time to read it carefully, keep it safe and show it to anyone who asks about the treatment you have received or who helps to look after you.

Allergy, sensitivity or intolerance?

Allergy – a reaction produced by the body's immune system when exposed to a normally harmless substance.

Sensitivity – the exaggeration of the normal effects of a substance; for example, the caffeine in a cup of coffee may cause extreme symptoms, such as palpitations and trembling.

Intolerance – where a substance causes unpleasant symptoms, such as diarrhoea, but doesn't involve the immune system; people with an intolerance to certain foods can typically eat a small amount without having any problems.

The most important aspect of managing an allergy is to AVOID the substance that you are allergic to (the allergen).

Signs and Symptoms

Despite avoiding the allergic substances, accidents can happen. In an allergic reaction any of the following symptoms may occur:

Mild/moderate symptoms

- Tingling, itching or burning sensation in the mouth (this is a useful warning that you have eaten a food you are allergic to)
- A nasty taste in the mouth
- Itching of skin, throat and/or eyes
- Rapid development of nettle rash / wheals / hives
- Swelling, particularly of the face and lips
- Feeling hot or chilled

- Rising anxiety / Flushed Skin
- Tummy, abdominal or stomach pain
- Nausea and/or vomiting

Severe symptoms (known as anaphylaxis)

The presence of any one or several of these features indicates an anaphylactic reaction, which needs to be treated immediately with Epinephrine (Adrenaline):

- Severe swelling of the tongue or throat associated with difficulty in breathing
- Difficulty talking or hoarse voice
- Severe wheeze or difficulty breathing
- Faintness or dizziness
- Looking very pale or blue and clammy
- Disorientated or unresponsive

Milder reactions are much more common. Anaphylaxis, the most severe type of allergic reaction, is uncommon. It can be life threatening but is very rarely fatal.

Most reactions occur quickly after ingestion or contact with the allergen. Only rarely do they occur a few hours later. There can also be a second phase of the reaction when symptoms recur. This usually occurs within 6 hours of the onset of the reaction.

Further Information

The Anaphylaxis Campaign

www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

Allergy UK

www.allergyuk.org

NHS Choices

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergies>

Actions / Treatment

Actions for Mild / Moderate Symptoms

- ✓ Take an antihistamine such as Chlorphenamine (Piriton), Cetirizine (Zirtek) or Loratadine (Clarityn). (Cetirizine or Loratadine may be better, because they are non-sedating antihistamines and do not cause drowsiness.)
- ✓ Treat mild wheeziness with a blue reliever inhaler (if you have one) such as Salbutamol (Ventolin) or Terbutaline (Bricanyl).
- ✓ Let someone know that you are having a reaction and ask them to stay with you to help monitor the reaction to make sure it is getting better, not worse.

Actions for Severe Symptoms

Remember mild symptoms may develop into a more serious reaction.

If the symptoms are or do become severe, as listed earlier, treatment is with an injected drug called Adrenaline.

The recommended way of giving adrenaline is with an EpiPen Autoinjector. This is a pre-filled syringe with a concealed spring-activated needle, which automatically injects the correct dose of Adrenaline when the device is pushed firmly against the thigh.

- ✓ Phone 999 and ask for an ambulance stating that it is a severe allergic reaction.
- ✓ Lying down may help if you feel dizzy or light-headed. If you are breathless, you may feel more comfortable sitting up.
- ✓ Continue to monitor the condition. If there is no improvement after 10 minutes, a second dose of Adrenaline can be given via another EpiPen. (One dose per EpiPen). Note the time of both doses.