



# **ALLERGIES**

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Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance—such a drug, pollen, bee sting, or pet dander. It could as well result from food that wouldn't cause a reaction in most people.

The human body is laced with a defensive system known as the immune system. The immune system produces substances known as antibodies; and these antibodies are triggered by allergens.

When you have allergies, your immune system makes antibodies that identify a particular allergen as harmful, even though it isn't. When you get a second exposure to the same allergen, your immune system will react in various ways, including inflamed skin, sinuses and airways, and digestive tracts.

The severity of allergies varies from person to person; it can range from mild irritation to anaphylaxis—a potentially life-threatening emergency.

## CAUSES

An allergic response begins when normally harmless substance is mistaken for dangerous invader by your immune system. Hence, the production of antibodies.

These antibodies, like soldiers ready for battle, remain active against future exposure to the same antigen.

When a second exposure occurs, your immune system will release chemicals, such as histamine, which eventually result in allergy symptoms.

### Common allergy triggers include:

- **Insect stings**, such as bees or wasp
- **Latex**, used in the production of various materials, such as latex condoms
- **Certain food**, such as wheat, particularly peanuts, shellfish, soy, eggs and milk
- **Airborne allergens**, such as animal dander, pollen, dust mites and mold
- **Medications**, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin, and penicillin or penicillin-based antibiotics

# SYMPTOMS

Allergic reactions can range from minor irritation to severe life-threatening reaction known as anaphylaxis. Depending on the substance involved, allergy symptoms can affect your airways, sinuses, skin, and other body organs. Here are some of the various allergy symptoms of different causative agents:

## **An insect sting allergy can cause:**

- An inflamed area (edema) at the sting site
- Itching and hives throughout the body
- Cough, wheezing, chest tightness, and difficulty in breathing
- Anaphylaxis

## **A drug allergy can cause:**

- Mild to severe skin rash
- Itching skin
- Facial swelling
- Hives
- Anaphylaxis

## **A food allergy can cause:**

- Swelling of the lips, throat, tongue or face
- Itching skin
- Facial swelling
- Hives
- Anaphylaxis

## **Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) can cause:**

- Sneezing
- Runny and/or stuffy nose
- Watery, red or swollen eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Itching of the nose, eyes and/or roof of the mouth



# ANAPHYLAXIS

Most of the types of allergic reactions highlighted above can trigger a severe life-threatening reaction known as anaphylaxis. This is a medical emergency that requires an immediate medical attention. Anaphylaxis can lead to shock if not treated quickly. Here are some of its signs and symptoms:

- Collapsing or losing consciousness
- Skin rash
- A sudden drop in blood pressure
- Lightheadedness
- A rapid, weak pulse
- Nausea and vomiting
- Wheezing
- Clammy skin





# PREVENTION

Preventing allergic reactions depends on the type of allergy you have. Here are the general measures that could help reduce your risk:

- Identify any triggers—you need to understand the various possible triggers prior to previous episodes of allergic reactions. You may need to keep a diary of your activities, what you eat, when symptoms occur. However, in severe cases, you may need to visit an allergy clinic for allergy tests.
- Avoid triggers whenever possible—if you are allergic to pollen, you may need to close your windows and doors regularly, especially when pollen is high. If you are allergic to dust mites, dust and vacuum and wash bedding as often as possible.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet—if you are one of those who usually have severe allergic reaction, a medical alert bracelet would let others know that you have a serious allergy should there is a reaction and you're unable to communicate.





# WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If you suspect you might be coming down with some sort of allergic reactions, whether mild or severe, you may need to take a trip to your health care provider.

Furthermore, if you start having unintended side effects after starting a new medication, you may need to discuss this with your doctor for further evaluation, and possible reduction in dosage or drug.

For severe cases of anaphylaxis, kindly seek immediate medical attention, as every minute counts in combating allergic reaction.

For recurrent episodes of allergy symptoms, especially anaphylaxis, you may need to discuss long term management options with your health care provider.