

ALLERGIES

Allergies can be bothersome when mild and life threatening when severe. What are allergies and what can you do about them?

What is an allergy?

- An allergy is an immune response triggered by something you breathe in, touch or eat.
- An allergen is a substance that causes an allergy such as pollen, dust, a food or something that comes into contact with the skin.

What Causes an Allergy?

- An allergy starts when your immune system mistakes a normally harmless substance for a dangerous invader and produces antibodies to it. The next time you're exposed to that allergen, an allergic reaction is caused.

What are the Symptoms of an Allergy?

- The symptoms depend on the area exposed to the allergen.
- An allergy triggered by something inhaled – such as pollen – include sneezing, itchy eyes, nasal congestion and watery eyes. Hayfever is a common allergy caused by something breathed in.
- An allergy to something eaten may cause swelling or tingling of the mouth and throat, hives, nausea and diarrhoea. Many people are allergic to eggs, peanuts or seafood. Coeliac's disease is a severe food allergy, caused by gluten, which causes ulceration in the intestines.
- Allergies affecting the skin, known as dermatitis or eczema, may cause red, flaky, peeling or inflamed skin. Latex (as in latex gloves) and cleaning products often cause skin allergies.
- Insect bites are another thing that can cause an allergic response – usually in the form of swelling and itching around the bite site plus wheezing or shortness of breath.

Can Allergies be Lethal?

- Yes – anaphylaxis is a severe, life threatening allergic reaction. Typically, there is nausea and vomiting, light-headedness, a skin rash, difficulty breathing and loss of consciousness. If emergency first aid isn't applied, such as adrenalin or an EpiPen, the person may die.

Can Allergies Get Worse?

- Absolutely – many allergic reactions, especially those to food or insect bites, become more rapid and severe the more often they occur.

Can You Grow Out of an Allergy?

- Yes – some people appear to grow out of allergies they have as young children. Allergies to eggs are a common one. However, it is unusual to grow out of allergies to nuts or seafood.

Can You Get Rid of an Allergy?

- Generally, you can't get rid of an allergy. It is best to stay away from the allergen.

What is a Food Intolerance?

- Food intolerances are not allergies – they are caused by other things such as a lack of a digestive enzyme (as in lactose intolerance) or sensitivity to a food component such as a sugar or additive.
- The symptoms of a food sensitivity are similar to a food allergy: bloating, cramping, nausea/vomiting or diarrhoea - but sensitivities do not lead to anaphylaxis.
- People with an intolerance can usually eat a small amount of the food before getting a reaction.