

Allergies & Allergy Medication

What is an allergy?

An allergy is an immune system reaction to a substance. The immune system protects the body from harmful bacteria and viruses. Sometimes it reacts to substances that are not otherwise dangerous, such as pollens, animals, and certain medications. Sometimes the tendency to suffer from allergies runs in families, but some people never develop any allergies. It is not possible to predict what substances you might become allergic to. You may develop an allergy to a substance even if you have been exposed to it in the past without any problems.

TYPES OF ALLERGIC REACTIONS

Allergic rhinitis and seasonal allergies: also known as “hayfever”, this type of allergy is characterized by runny nose, congestion, sneezing, itchy eyes, and sometimes headaches. It is most common in the spring and summer (pollens) but some people have it year-round (animals, dust).

Hives and skin reactions: hives are raised wheals on the skin that can appear after exposure to an allergen either through contact or ingestion. They are very itchy and may come and go or appear at different places on the body. They are the result of histamine release in the skin. Other types of rashes can occur after exposure to allergens also.

Anaphylaxis: an extreme form of allergic reaction in which swelling in the throat and difficulty breathing begin with a few minutes of exposure to an allergic substance. It is a medical emergency.
Common allergens

COMMON ALLERGIES

Pollens and environmental: many people have allergies to tree, grass, and flower pollens. These sorts of allergies tend to be worse in the spring, summer, and fall. Nasal congestion, runny nose, itchy eyes, and sore throat are common symptoms.

Pets and animals: cats, dogs, horses and other mammals are most likely to cause allergic symptoms, both respiratory and/or skin reactions.

Dust and mold: exposure to these usually causes respiratory allergy symptoms.

Insects: stinging insects such as bees and wasps can cause allergic rash or hives and in extreme cases anaphylaxis.

Medications: virtually any medication can cause an allergic rash or anaphylaxis. Antibiotics and pain medications are often implicated. Nausea and vomiting alone from taking a medication without development of a rash or breathing difficulty is not a true allergy, but a sensitivity.

Topical products: any product may cause an allergic rash. Common culprits are nickel, latex, and PABA (an ingredient in some cosmetics). If you develop skin irritation after using a new soap, lotion, cosmetic product, detergent, or fragrance you may have an allergy.

Foods: peanuts and tree nuts, milk, shellfish, certain fruits are most commonly associated with allergies. Reaction can range from hives and rash to anaphylaxis.

FIGURING OUT WHAT YOU ARE ALLERGIC TO

If you have any concerns that you might be allergic to something, consult with a healthcare provider. Sometimes special testing needs to be done to determine the cause of symptoms.

MANAGING ALLERGIES

The main objective is to avoid the allergen! Depending on the type of allergen and reaction, this may mean staying indoors when pollen counts are high, staying away from animals, products, or foods that are a problem, and carefully reading food labels. You may also need to do environmental control measures such as frequently vacuuming your sleeping area, using special mattress and pillow covers, using air filters or air conditioners, and controlling mold in your dwelling.

Allergy Medications-Over the Counter

	Examples	Useful for:	Precautions
Antihistamines	Diphenhydramine (Benadryl ®) Chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton ®) Cetirizine (Zyrtec ®) Fexofenadine (Allegra ®) Loratadine (Claritin ®)	Allergic Rhinitis/Seasonal Hives (especially diphenhydramine)	Diphenhydramine and Chlorpheniramine can make you sleepy.
Allergy Eyedrops	Ketotifen (Zaditor ®, Alaway ®) Naphazoline (Naphcon-A ®, Visine-A ®)	Allergic Rhinitis/Seasonal with eye symptoms	If you are not sure of your diagnosis, do not use until consult with provider.
Nasal Sprays	Fluticasone (Flonase ®) Budesonide (Rhinocourt ®) Triamcinolone (Nasacort ®)	Allergic Rhinitis/Seasonal allergies	May take a week or more of regular use to work. Can cause nosebleeds, especially if sprayed toward the nasal septum.
Steroids (Topical)	Hydrocortisone (cream, ointment, spray 0.5% - 1% strength)	Insect bites Topical allergies limited to small area	Do not use on face, near eyes, or genital areas unless directed by provider.
Epinephrine (prescription only)	EpiPen, Auvi-Q	Anaphylaxis	Seek medical care after self administration. Follow prescriber's instructions.

References:

<https://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/library/allergy-library/triamcinolone-nasal-spray>
DeShazo et al, "Pharmacotherapy of Allergic Rhinitis". Uptodate. 4/22/2016. Accessed 5/2/2016

American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology Website: ACAAI.org/allergies

In addition to the above, there are prescription allergy medications available. Some people benefit from allergy desensitization shots. These treatments can be discussed with your healthcare provider. If you have swelling of your lips, tongue, throat, or face or any trouble breathing, get medical attention immediately.

YOU MAY ALSO CONTACT HEALTH & WELLNESS IF YOU HAVE ANY
QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.



Health & Wellness

603-862-9355 • unh.edu/health • @UNHHealth



ACCREDITATION ASSOCIATION
for AMBULATORY HEALTH CARE, INC.