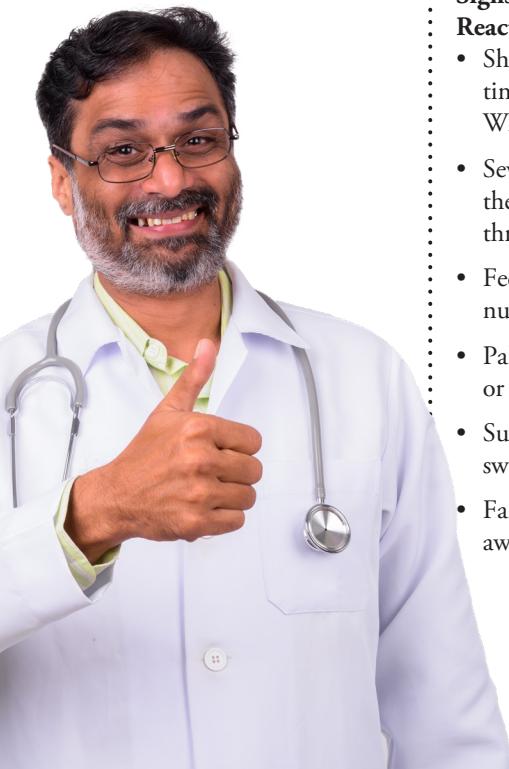




# Allergies

An allergy is an immune system problem to a substance (allergen) that is normally harmless.

An allergen can be inhaled, swallowed, enter the bloodstream, or come in contact with the skin.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

### Common Allergies

- Sneezing. Watery eyes. Cold symptoms that last longer than 10 days without a fever. Dark circles under the eyes.
- Frequent throat clearing. Hoarseness. Coughing or wheezing.
- Skin rash
- Loss of smell or taste. Allergy symptoms usually affect the breathing passages, eyes, or skin.
- Ear and sinus infections occur again and again.
- Nausea and vomiting

### Signs of a Severe Allergic Reaction

- Shortness of breath. A hard time breathing or swallowing. Wheezing.
- Severe swelling all over, or of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat
- Feeling dizzy, weak, and/or numb
- Pale or bluish lips, skin, and/or fingernails
- Sudden onset of pale skin and sweating
- Fainting. Decreasing level of awareness.



## CAUSES

- Allergic rhinitis. This is caused by breathing allergens from animal dander; dust; grass, weed and tree pollen; mold spores, etc.
- Asthma
- Food allergies, such as cow's milk, shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts (like walnuts), wheat, corn, soy, and eggs
- Skin allergies, such as latex

Anaphylaxis is a sudden and severe allergic reaction. It occurs within minutes of exposure. It worsens very fast. It can lead to anaphylactic shock and death within 15 minutes if emergency medical care is not received.

Insect stings, nuts, penicillin, and shellfish are common causes of a severe allergic reaction.

## TREATMENT

How are allergies treated? Avoid the allergen(s). Skin tests can identify allergens. Allergy shots may be prescribed. Medications can prevent and relieve symptoms.

Persons who have had a sudden, severe allergic reaction may be prescribed medicine, such as an EpiPen. This is an auto-injector that contains epinephrine. It is used to reduce the effects of a severe reaction. Once injected, call for emergency medical care.



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Do you have any of these problems?

- Signs of a severe allergic reaction
- Chest pain or tightening
- Seizures
- Cough that doesn't let up and a hard time breathing

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Do you have any of these problems?

- Flushing, redness all over the body
- Severe hives
- Hoarseness
- Feeling restless. Anxiety. Trembling.
- Enlarged pupils
- A severe reaction occurred in the past after exposure to a like substance

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Do you have any of these problems?

- Fever, fatigue, headache, or a rash that persists
- New onset of joint pain
- New onset of swelling in the limbs
- Mild symptoms improve after taking an antihistamine, but come back or don't go away completely

**NO**

**YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
[aafa.org](http://aafa.org)



## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

### Severe Allergic Reaction

- Take prescribed medicine, such as an EpiPen, as advised. Then get emergency care!
- Wear a medical ID alert tag for things that cause a severe allergic reaction.
- Avoid things you are allergic to.



### Other Allergic Reactions

- If mild symptoms occur after you take a medicine, call your doctor for advice.
- For hives and itching, take an OTC antihistamine, such as Benadryl. Take it as prescribed by your doctor or as directed on the label.
- Don't use hot water for baths, showers, or to wash rash areas. Heat worsens most rashes and makes them itch more.
- For itching, use an oatmeal bath or calamine (not Caladryl) lotion. You can also use a paste made with 3 teaspoons of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of water.
- Read food labels. Don't eat foods that have things you are allergic to. When you eat out, find out if menu items have things you are allergic to before you order them.