

Topic: Allergies

What is it?

- An allergy is an abnormal response of the immune system. People have allergies when their immune system reacts to usually harmless substances (i.e. pollen, mold, animal dander).
- A person gets exposed to an allergen by swallowing it, getting it on their skin, or inhaling the allergen
- Your body makes IgE (an antibody) in response to allergens
- Histamine, is the main chemical, that causes most of the symptoms of an allergic reaction

Who gets it?

Prevalence:

- Allergies are very common and at least 2 out of 10 Americans have allergies
- Allergies can also be hereditary—if one of your parents is allergic to a particular substance, your risk increases to 30% and if both parents are allergic to one substance your risk is greater than 60%

Risk factors:

- Environment, smoking, pollution, infections can all influence allergies
- Allergies can lead to asthma attacks, sinusitis (which is the inflammation or swelling of your sinuses), you could also go into anaphylactic shock (difficulty breathing)

Types of Allergies:

1. **Food Allergies:** Food allergies or food intolerances affect nearly everyone at some point. People often have an unpleasant reaction to something they ate and wonder if they have a food allergy.
 - Nut Allergies: If you suffer from a nut allergy, strictly avoiding nuts, including peanuts and tree nuts like cashews and walnuts, and food containing nuts is the only way to prevent a reaction.
 - Milk Allergies: If you suffer from a milk allergy, strictly avoiding milk and food containing milk and milk products is the only way to prevent a reaction, which can include immediate wheezing, vomiting, and hives.
 - Wheat Allergies: If you are allergic to any wheat protein strictly avoiding wheat and wheat products is the only way to prevent a reaction, which can include stomach upset, eczema, allergic rhinitis, bronchospasm (asthma-like symptoms) and even anaphylaxis.
2. **Spring Allergies:** Spring is the time of year that we normally think of when it comes to seasonal allergies. As the trees start to bloom and the pollen gets airborne, allergy sufferers begin their annual ritual of sniffing and sneezing. Trees to Avoid if you suffer from Tree Pollen Allergies: Alder, Poplar, Maple, Oak, Willow (Show Pictures)

3. **Mold Allergies:** People with mold allergies, however, may have a reaction if exposed to too much of the fungus.
4. **Dust Allergies:** Life with dust allergies -- whether they're yours or a family member's -- comes with a load of questions.
5. **Pet Allergies:** For a person with dog allergies, life in a dog-loving country isn't easy. Nearly 40% of U.S. households have a dog. Dog dander gets everywhere, including places where dogs have never set a paw.

What can be done?

Treatment: Allergy medications, antihistamines, decongestants, nasal spray, allergy eye drops, allergy shots, dehumidifiers, saline drops

Screening: Allergy skin test, blood test for allergies

Prevention: If it is a food allergy avoid the particular food derivatives in your diet, avoid pets that you may be allergic to or avoid coming in contact with substances that cause you to itch

Suggested Activities:

- Showing pictures of trees and bushes (poison ivy) to avoid in order to inhibit allergic reactions

Discussion Questions:

- Do you have any ideas on home remedies for particular allergies?
- Are there particular things you avoid because you feel that you are allergic to it?
- When do you usually get allergies, if any?