



Take control of your allergies

Tips to manage, treat and help prevent an allergy attack



What exactly is an allergy?

An allergy occurs when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance that is usually harmless and doesn't cause a reaction in most people. Those things are called triggers or allergens. Allergies are very common. At least 1 in 5 Americans has one.

What causes allergies?

Genes (if both parents have allergies, their children are more likely to develop them), the environment (e.g., pollen, dust) and upper respiratory infections are the main causes of allergies.

What are some of the most common allergies?

Pollen, animal dander, dust mites, insect stings, mold, food, latex, roaches, medicines and food.

What happens during an allergic reaction?

If you come into contact with a trigger, your body starts to make a protein called Immunoglobulin E (IgE). Then histamine and other chemicals get released into the blood and you'll get an "allergy symptom" or an "allergic reaction."

What are some allergy symptoms?

It depends on the allergy you have (for example, pollen vs. mold vs. food). Symptoms include: runny nose, sneezing, rash, hives, shortness of breath, vomiting, diarrhea and swelling of the lips, tongue, face or throat.

Ways you can help treat and prevent allergic reactions

1. Use over-the-counter and prescription drugs, and allergy shots
2. Try lifestyle changes like using air filters and avoiding triggers
3. Talk to your doctor about the best treatment for you



Sources:
National Institutes of Health Medline Plus website: medlineplus.gov
Mayo Clinic website: mayoclinic.org
WebMD website: webmd.com
Health 24 website: health24.com
KidsHealth website: kidshealth.org
Food Allergy Research & Education website: foodallergy.org
Parents Network website: parents.com

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How do you know for sure if you have an allergy?

To pinpoint an allergy and decide on a treatment, your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and habits, and do some tests like a skin or blood test. If it could be a food allergy, your doctor may ask you to keep a food diary or remove certain foods from your diet.

Allergies in kids

- About 15 million Americans have food allergies, including 5.9 million children under age 18. That's 1 in 13 children.
- About 30% of children with food allergies are allergic to more than one food.
- Allergies to milk, egg, wheat and soy often resolve in childhood, while allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish are generally lifelong.

Tips for new moms:

- Pregnant? It's O.K. to eat allergenic foods unless you are allergic to them (such as wheat, soy, cow's milk, fish, shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts and eggs). There's no proof that staying away from them lowers allergy risks in babies and cutting them from your diet may cause the loss of crucial nutrients for you and your baby.
- Breastfeeding? Researchers believe that breastfeeding may help ward off food allergies.

Tips to allergy-proof your environment

- **Windows:** If you're allergic to pollen, keep them closed and use air conditioning.
- **Temperature:** Dust mites and mold love hot, humid houses. Keep your home temperature around 70°; keep humidity under 50%.
- **Bed and bedding:** Wash sheets, pillowcases and blankets once a week in hot water. Use dust-mite-proof covers for pillows, mattresses and box springs.
- **Floors:** If you can, get hardwood or linoleum floors instead of carpet. Make sure any rugs are washable to help control dust and mold. Vacuum at least once a week.
- **Smoking:** Don't let anyone smoke in your home. Avoid cigarette smoke when outdoors.
- **Cleaning:** Wear a painter's mask when you vacuum, clean, work in the garden or mow the lawn.
- **Food and drinks:** Check labels to make sure they don't have anything you're allergic to.
- **Medicines:** Avoid taking any drug, and others like it, that you're allergic to. Consider wearing a medical alert bracelet in case you have an emergency.

