



Having a bad reaction?

Allergy signs and treatments

Watery eyes, itchiness, runny nose. Sound familiar? If it does, you might have allergies.

An allergic reaction is when your immune system has a bad response to something. It normally protects your body from getting sick because of things like bacteria and viruses. It also helps protect you against allergens, the things that set off an allergic reaction.^{1,2} When it doesn't do that job, it's like having a really sensitive alarm system - it alerts your body to things that really shouldn't cause a reaction.

What causes allergies?

A lot of people have allergies. Your genes and the environment can play a role in that. If both of your parents have allergies, you'll probably have allergies. But, you may not be allergic to the same things or have the same reactions.¹

Common allergy triggers are:^{1,2}

- Pollen
- Mold
- Pet dander
- Dust
- Food
- Medicines
- Insect bites
- Jewelry
- Makeup
- Spices

Signs

Allergy symptoms can be different from one person to the next. But here are some common signs:^{1,2}

- Breathing problems
- Burning, tearing, itchy, red or swollen eyes
- Coughing
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Hives
- Itchy nose, mouth, throat, skin or other part of the body
- Runny nose
- Skin rash
- Stomach cramps
- Throwing up
- Wheezing

What can you do?

If you think you have an allergy, tell your doctor. There are different ways to test if you have an allergy, such as:^{1,2}

- Skin test
- Blood test or complete blood count
- Use or elimination tests: avoiding certain things to see if you get better or using certain things to see if you get worse

The best way to reduce your symptoms is to try to avoid the things that cause your allergies.^{1,2} Sometimes, that's not so easy to do. It might be easy to stay away from certain foods or medicines. But if your allergy trigger comes from the air around you, it can be hard to avoid.

Allergies can't be cured, but there are ways to treat and relieve your symptoms. Treatment will depend on the kind of allergy you have and how bad it is. Medicines or allergy shots may help. But you may need to get shots for years before they work. And they don't always work for everyone.¹

Severe allergic reactions, called anaphylaxis, need to be treated with a medicine called epinephrine. It can save a person's life, if it's taken immediately after a severe allergic reaction.^{1,2}

Allergies in kids

Some research has shown that breastfeeding babies until they're at least 4 months old may help prevent a certain allergy to cow's milk.¹

Changes in the mother's diet while she's pregnant or breastfeeding don't seem to make a difference in preventing allergies in kids. But, the timing of when your kids start eating solid foods and when they first try certain foods can help prevent some allergies.¹

Some kids may outgrow allergies when they get older, especially food allergies.¹

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Tips to allergy-proof your environment:^{3,4,5}

- **Windows:** Keep them closed and use air conditioning if you're allergic to pollen.
- **Temperature:** Dust mites and mold love hot, humid houses. So, keep the temperature in your home at 70°. And keep the humidity under 50% to prevent mold from growing.
- **Bed and bedding:** Wash your sheets, pillowcases and blankets at least once a week in hot water. Use covers for pillows, mattresses and box springs to help against dust mites.
- **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 you go out.
- **Cleaning:** Wear a painter's mask when you vacuum or clean, work in the garden or mow the lawn.
- **Food:** Always check the labels of what you're eating or drinking to make sure they don't include something you're allergic to.
- **Medicines:** If you have a drug allergy, you need to avoid taking it. You may need to avoid other drugs like it, too. Think about wearing a medical alert bracelet, in case you have an emergency.

Resources

Check out the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology website at aaaai.org for more information about allergies. You can take the Skin Allergy Quiz to help you find out about any skin allergy trigger you may have. And The Virtual Allergist™ can help you figure out if you have an allergy by checking signs you have. You can also search for a doctor who treats allergies. The WebMD® Allergies Health Center at webmd.com/allergies also has an allergy quiz, as well as slideshows about allergy triggers, treatments and more.

Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following sources:

- 1 PubMed Health. *Allergies*. (Accessed November 17, 2011): ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001815/
- 2 Mayo Clinic. *Allergies*. (Accessed November 17, 2011): mayoclinic.com
- 3 Mayo Clinic. *Allergy-proof your house*. (Accessed November 17, 2011): mayoclinic.com
- 4 Mayo Clinic. *Food allergies* (Accessed November 17, 2011): mayoclinic.com
- 5 Mayo Clinic. *Drug Allergy*. (Accessed November 17, 2011): mayoclinic.com