



Your Health Matters!

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Allergy, Hay fever and Anaphylaxis

Allergies are very common and affect one in three people at some time in their lives. There are many different causes of allergy and symptoms vary from mild to potentially life threatening. An allergic reaction occurs when a person's immune system reacts to substances in the environment that are harmless to most people.

These substances are known as allergens and can be found in house dust mites, pet hair, pollen, insects bite, moulds, foods (e.g. peanuts, cow's milk, soy, seafood, eggs) and some medicines. 80% of people with asthma also have allergies but not all triggers for asthma (e.g. cold air, exercise, infection) are allergens.

Allergies can cause symptoms in the:

- nose and/or eyes - hay fever (allergic rhinitis/ allergic conjunctivitis)
- skin - eczema, hives (urticaria)
- lungs - asthma

What happens when you have an allergic reaction?

When a person who is allergic to a particular allergen comes into contact with it, an allergic reaction occurs. This begins when the allergen (e.g. pollen) enters the body, triggering an antibody response. The antibodies attach themselves to special cells, called mast cells. When the pollen comes into contact with the antibodies, the mast cells respond by releasing certain substances, one of which is called histamine. When the release of histamine is due to an allergen, the resulting swelling and inflammation is irritating and very uncomfortable.

What is hay fever?

Hay fever is the common name for allergic rhinitis. It is an allergic reaction to allergens breathed in through the nose and causes an immune response in the lining of the nose, where nasal passages become swollen and inflamed.

What are the symptoms of hay fever?

- ✓ Blocked nose , watery, runny nose
- ✓ Sneezing, Nasal itching, watery eyes

Less common symptoms may include:

- ✓ Headaches, impaired sense of smell
- ✓ Swollen and/or itchy eyes

Identifying and avoiding allergens

Your GP can refer you to have an allergy test and once the allergens are confirmed, your doctor or the Asthma Foundation can give you practical tips on how to reduce exposure to those allergens.

Hay fever medications

Includes corticosteroid nasal sprays which can reduce inflammation and mucous production thus they are 1st line therapy when symptoms are moderate to severe and mainly nasal. It may take a while for it to work and it needs to be used regularly. Antihistamine has faster onset, can help to relieve runny nose, sneezing, itching and eye symptoms and it is for mild or occasional hay fever. Decongestant nasal spray and tablets are used for unblocking the nose. Saline spray can also help to relieve symptoms by washing away pollens and irritants.

Allergy treatment from ASCIA can be found at:

<http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/allergic-rhinitis-hay-fever-and-sinusitis/allergic-rhinitis-treatment-plan>

What is anaphylaxis and how is it treated?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life threatening. It usually occurs rapidly after exposure to a food, insect or medicine to which a person may already be allergic.

Anaphylaxis must always be treated as a medical emergency and requires immediate treatment with adrenaline. Adrenaline autoinjectors (EpiPen® or Anapen®) are designed to be given by non-medical people, including parents, school or childcare staff, friends, bystanders or the allergic person themselves. Adrenaline autoinjector devices contain a single, fixed dose of adrenaline that works rapidly to reverse anaphylaxis.

FIRST AID for anaphylaxis

- Lay person flat - if breathing is difficult, allow to sit - do not allow them to stand or walk
- Give the adrenaline autoinjector - if available
- Call Ambulance - 000
- Contact parent/guardian or other emergency contact
- Further adrenaline doses may be given if there is no response after 5 minutes.
- If in doubt, give the adrenaline autoinjector.
- Commence CPR at any time if person is unresponsive and not breathing normally.

The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA)

<http://www.allergy.org.au>

Fact Sheet for Anaphylaxis <http://www.allergy.org.au/health-professionals/anaphylaxis-resources/fact-sheet-for-parents-anaphylaxis-wa>

