

Allergy Overview

Allergies are one of the most common chronic diseases. A chronic disease lasts a long time or occurs often. An allergy occurs when the body's immune system sees a substance as harmful and overreacts to it. The substances that cause allergic reactions are *allergens*. When someone has allergies, their immune system makes an antibody called immunoglobulin E (IgE). These antibodies respond to allergens. The symptoms that result are an *allergic reaction*.

What Are the Types of Allergens?

- [Drug](#) (medicine)
- [Food](#)
- [Insects](#) that sting (bee, wasp, fire ant); bite (mosquito, tick); or are household pests (cockroach and dust mite)
- [Latex](#)
- [Mold](#)
- [Pet](#) (dog or cat urine, saliva and dander)
- [Pollen](#)

What Are the Symptoms of Allergies?

The most common allergy symptoms can simply make you uncomfortable. For example, you may have watery eyes, runny nose, sneezing, a rash or hives. Other more serious symptoms, like trouble breathing and swelling in your mouth or throat, may be a life-threatening reaction called [anaphylaxis](#) ("anna-fih-LACK-sis").

How Do Doctors Diagnose Allergies?

Doctors diagnose allergies in three steps. They review your personal and medical history. They give you a physical exam. They do tests to identify your allergens.

What Are the Treatments for Allergies?

Good allergy treatment is based on your medical history and the severity of your symptoms. It can include three different treatment strategies: avoidance of allergens, medication options and/or immunotherapy (a treatment to train your immune system not to overreact).

How Can I Prevent an Allergic Reaction?

The best way to prevent an allergic reaction is to avoid your allergens. It sounds so easy, but you can't always avoid them. For example, it's not possible to avoid all outdoor activities if you're allergic to bees and wasps. But there are steps you can take to reduce your chances of being stung and you can carry the medicine you will need if you are stung. It is important to prepare and have an allergy action plan.

Don't let allergies interfere with your day-to-day activities at home, work or school. You can live a normal life despite having allergies. See your allergist for treatment and guidance. Take steps to avoid your allergens. Keep medicine with you at all times so you can treat an allergic reaction. Use our tips to help you manage your daily life with allergies.

Allergy Facts and Figures

Allergies are increasing. They affect as many as 30 percent of adults and 40 percent of children in the United States.

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