

Allergic Reaction

Allergic reactions occur when you come in contact with substances that are sensitive to your body. They can be caused by food, drugs, infections, insect bites, animals, things you breathe (such as pollen and dust) and skin contact with irritants such as latex, cosmetics and soaps. A severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction may be mild:

- + Vomiting
- + Rash
- + Watery eyes
- + Runny nose

Or they could be severe or life-threatening:

- + Difficulty breathing
- + Rapid or pounding heart rate
- + Swelling of throat or tongue
- + Chest tightness

Onset of allergic reactions can vary. Most occur within minutes after exposure to allergens but some can occur after several hours, particularly if allergens cause reactions after digestion. You may have been exposed to a substance in the past without having a reaction. Once you have a reaction, you will usually react when exposed again.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AT HOME

- + Avoid contact with substances that cause reactions.
- + If you have had a severe allergic reaction, have someone stay with you for 24 hours in case the symptoms return

- + For rashes or hives from an allergic reaction, take a cool shower or bath (avoid hot water), and apply cool compresses to the skin to relieve itching and discomfort.
- + Rest and cut down on physical activities until the symptoms have gone.
- + If unsure of what caused the reaction, keep a list of activities, foods eaten, or exposures to environmental elements. Note any symptoms or new outbreaks that occur.
- + Check with your doctor before taking any medications, including ones that you buy at the drug store.
- + If you are given medications called anti-histamines (e.g. Benadryl), you should not drive or do things that require your full attention. Anti-histamines may cause you to feel sleepy.
- + Some people have both allergies and asthma. **In the event of a severe reaction, the order of taking medication is:**
 1. Epinephrine first for anaphylaxis.
 2. Your medication for asthma.
 3. Then call 911 or go to the Emergency Department.
- + If you have had a severe allergic reaction, you should carry an allergy kit (e.g. Epipen) with you at all times. The doctor may provide a prescription and emergency care plan for an anaphylaxis kit.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Call 9-1-1 if any of the following develop:

- + Difficulty breathing.
- + Wheezing.
- + A tight feeling in your chest or throat.
Hoarse voice.
- + Feeling faint or a swollen mouth or tongue.

These are signs of an emergency, **call an ambulance.**

See your family doctor if:

- + Hives, rash or itches continue after 2 days of anti-histamine use.

TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in ___ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC EMN website: www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/allergic-reaction-anaphylaxis