

ALLERGIES



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Allergies are responses arising from the immune system to substances that come in contact with the body. Allergen, a substance that causes an allergic reaction, is identified by the immune system as a harmful substance even though it may not be harmful.

The common substances causing allergic reactions are food, dust, pollen, latex, medications, insect stings, pet dander and mold.

There are several types of allergy - food allergy, skin allergy such as contact dermatitis or atopic dermatitis, pet allergy, insect sting allergy, dust allergy, eye allergy, drug allergy, mold allergy, allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and latex allergic. A severe form of allergy known as anaphylaxis is a life-threatening condition.

The signs and symptoms differ based on the type of allergy. In food allergy, you may experience swelling of tongue/lips/throat/face, hives, tingling sensation or even anaphylaxis. In drug allergy, one may experience hives, rash, itchy skin, swelling of face, wheezing or anaphylaxis. An insect sting allergy may cause swelling at the location, itching, hives, cough, shortness of breath, wheezing or anaphylaxis. In atopic dermatitis, also known as eczema, there is itchiness, rashes, redness and peeling of skin. In hay fever, you may experience runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes/nose or red, swollen, watery eyes. Dust allergy causes red, itchy, teary eyes and runny, stuffy nose. Drug allergy may induce skin rash, hives, itchiness, swelling or wheezing. An insect sting allergy causes pain, redness, swelling, hives or itching. In general most of the different types of allergies manifest similar signs and symptoms. Anaphylaxis is serious condition that may occur in any type of allergy in which a person experiences severe shortness of breath, rapid and weak pulse, a drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness and skin rash.

If you experience allergic symptoms, the doctor may recommend some tests or refer you to a specialist. In terms of diagnostic tests, there are few allergic tests such as blood test, skin prick test and patch test. The blood test measures the level of IgE antibodies. The patch test is a test to identify eczema. In skin prick test, the skin is pricked with a possible allergen to determine if you are allergic to that specific substance.

The treatment involves medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, steroid sprays and leukotriene receptor antagonists and which are available over the counter. In case of an emergency situation such as anaphylaxis reaction, an EpiPen (epinephrine injector) is required. Immunotherapy is used to treat only severe allergic reactions. Home remedies also exist for allergic reactions such as saline nasal irrigation for hay fever; HEPA filters to trap airborne irritants; acupuncture for seasonal rhinitis; butterbur is effective for itchy eyes; the use of probiotics; bromelain (an enzyme found in pineapple and papaya) is useful in improving breathing; using dehumidifiers and air conditioners; spirulina (a blue-green algae) is effective in

allergic rhinitis; intake of Vitamin C reduces histamine levels; quercetin (found in broccoli, cauliflower and green tea) aids in controlling allergic symptoms; and different types of essential oils such as peppermint and frankincense are effective in allergic rhinitis.

There is no specific way to prevent allergies. If you have experience an allergic reaction in the past, you need to avoid that specific allergen. If you are having an anaphylaxis reaction, immediate consultation is required.

References:

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