

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Allergies

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An allergy occurs when you react to substances in the environment that are harmless to most people. These substances that are recognized by the immune system and cause a reaction are known as allergens. Dust mites, pollen, ticks, and molds are common allergens. You may also have allergic reactions to certain foods, pets, and some medications.

Most allergic reactions/symptoms are mild to moderate and do not cause major problems. Common allergic symptoms are rashes, itchiness,

nasal congestion, watery eyes, mild swelling, fear or anxiety, nausea or vomiting, and weakness.



Severe allergy symptoms are more pronounced and warrant emergency treatment. Some of them are:

- Mild swelling can turn severe and spread to your throat and lungs and cause difficulty in breathing and cause blue coloration of skin and lips.
- Itchiness which turns red and spreads to your face and body.

You can experience lightheadedness or become unconscious.

In today's article, we will look at the frequently asked questions about allergies.

1. What is an allergic reaction?

Your immune system can sometimes respond to harmless substances known as allergens & protects you from viruses, bacteria, and infections. In case you come in contact with any harmless substance such as pollen, dust mites, pet dander, mold, latex, insect stings, or certain foods, your immune system can trigger a response and produce antibodies known as Immunoglobulin E (IgE).

These antibodies travel to the cells that release chemicals, causing symptoms generally in the nose, throat, lungs, sinuses, on the skin, or in the stomach.

The first time you are exposed to the allergen, it may not cause a reaction. Whenever you are exposed to the same allergen again, your immune system identifies it and produces the same response as earlier, known as an allergic reaction.

2. Who develops an allergy?

Anyone can develop an allergy, irrespective of age, gender, race, or status. While allergies are more commonly seen in children, they can occur for the first time at any age.

3. Are allergies life-threatening?

Allergy symptoms aren't usually life-threatening. However, a rare, sudden, and life-threatening allergic reaction is known as anaphylaxis.

Anaphylaxis is a severe reaction when an over-release of chemicals puts you in a shock. It is generally triggered by allergens such as foods, venom, drugs, or insect bites/stings. In anaphylaxis, the symptoms are more severe than in regular allergic reactions, such as dizziness, fainting, low blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, nausea, vomiting, trouble breathing, or cardiac arrest.

If left untreated or unattended, it can be fatal. Emergency hospitalization, intensive care, life support medicines, and intubation (the process of inserting a tube through the mouth and then into the airway to assist you with breathing) are required for the treatment of anaphylaxis.

4. What are seasonal allergies? Are all allergies seasonal?

Seasonal allergies, also called ‘hay fever or allergic rhinitis, are allergy symptoms that happen during certain times of the year only (seasonal). While most allergies are seasonal, you can have an allergic reaction anytime you come in contact with a particular allergen like:

- Pollens, liberated by roadside seasonal plants and vegetable farms can induce a variety of respiratory and skin manifestations like itchiness, redness, breathing difficulty, bluing of skin, wheezing, etc.
- Cosmetics, beauty treatments like facials, *mehendi or henna*, and jewellery can cause an allergic reaction at any point, which are not necessarily seasonal in nature.

5. How to handle allergic reactions in children?

Many things can trigger allergic reactions in children; from the bite of a bee or a mosquito to other allergens like pets, feathers, weed pollen, and more. Common allergic reactions or symptoms in

children include coughing, wheezing, itchy, red and dry skin, watery eyes, and sometimes, fainting or breathlessness.

Mild allergic reactions subside quickly and can be managed with topical or oral medications.

Some points to remember while treating allergic reactions in children are:

- Refrain from steroids unless extremely necessary.
- Opt for oral and topical medications that can soothe itchiness or redness of the skin.
- Cotton clothing is a better choice for children with sensitive skin.
- Keep windows and doors closed to protect children from pollen, mosquitoes, dust, and other airborne allergens.

6. What are common foods that cause allergies?



When you eat something you're allergic to, your immune system responds to protect you. Common foods that trigger allergic reactions are milk (mostly in children), eggs, nuts (walnuts, almonds, Brazilian nuts), peanuts, wheat, fish, and shellfish (mostly in adults). The less common foods that cause allergies include corn, gelatin (a colorless & flavorless food ingredient derived from collagen), and seeds (sunflower or sesame).

7. What are drug allergies?

A drug allergy is an abnormal reaction to a medication. Common OTC (over-the-counter) drugs that are capable of inducing an allergy are:

- Ibuprofen and aspirin: drugs used for treating pain, fever, and inflammation.
- Penicillin, ciprofloxacin, and sulfonamides: antibiotics used for treating bacterial infections.
- Cough mixtures or suppressants: used in the treatment of cough.

Symptoms of drug allergies include skin rashes, itchiness, redness, breathing problems, swelling, dizziness. If severe, can cause an anaphylactic reaction.

8. Can insect bites cause allergies?

Insect bites by bugs, cockroaches, millipedes, fleas, certain flies, crabs, or scorpions can induce intensely itchy eruptions (hives), tingling or itching inside the mouth, nausea or vomiting. In most cases, topical medications like gels and ointments are used to treat allergic symptoms of insect bites.

