



Trauma
Care

Newsletter

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TraumaCare

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Kids and Allergies



From personal experience, dealing with allergies in children can be an overwhelming experience. First to even pinpoint the actual culprit and then to manage it to ensure your child does not accidentally ingest something he is not suppose to.

My son suffered for year with a bad stomach and only now in his late teens are we slowly understanding the things he cannot eat.

Doctors could not pinpoint it and blamed everything including stress but never took it seriously enough.

An allergy is an overreaction of the immune system to a substance that's harmless to most people. But in someone with an allergy, the body's immune system treats the substance (called an **allergen**) as an invader and overreacts, causing symptoms that can range from annoying to serious or life threatening.

In an attempt to protect the body, the immune system of the allergic person produces antibodies called immunoglobulin E (IgE). Those antibodies then cause mast cells and basophils (allergy cells in the body) to release chemicals (including histamine) into the bloodstream to defend against the allergen "invader."

It's the release of these chemicals that causes allergic reactions, affecting a person's eyes, nose, throat, lungs, skin, or gastrointestinal tract as the body attempts to rid itself of the invading allergen. Future exposure to that same allergen will trigger this allergic response again. This means that every time the person eats that particular food or is exposed to that particular allergen, he or she will have an allergic reaction.

Who Gets Allergies?

The tendency to develop allergies is often hereditary, which means it can be passed down through your genes. However, just because you, your partner, or one of your children might have allergies doesn't mean that all of your kids will definitely get them, too. And someone usually doesn't inherit a *particular* allergy, just the likelihood of *having* allergies.

But a few kids have allergies even if *no* family member is allergic. And a child who is allergic to one substance is likely to be allergic to others.

Common Airborne Allergens

Some of the most common things people are allergic to are airborne (carried through the air):

Dust mites are one of the most common causes of allergies.

Pollen is another major cause of allergies (most people know pollen allergy as hay fever or rose fever).

Pollen counts measure how much pollen is in the air and can help people with allergies determine how bad their symptoms might be on any given day.

Molds, another common allergen, are fungi that thrive both indoors and outside in warm, moist environments.

Pet allergens from warm-blooded animals can cause problems for kids and parents alike.

Cockroaches are also a major household allergen, especially in inner cities.

Common Food Allergens

Cow's milk (or cow's milk protein). Between 2% and 3% of infants are allergic to the proteins found in cow's milk and cow's milk-based formulas.

Eggs. One of the most common food allergies in infants and young children, egg allergy can pose many challenges for parents.

Fish and shellfish. Fish and shellfish allergies are some of the more common adult food allergies and ones that people usually don't outgrow.

Peanuts and tree nuts. Peanut allergy is another common food allergy in kids, with the number of those who are allergic on the rise. (Peanuts are not a true nut, but a legume — in the same family as peas and lentils, although most people with peanut allergy don't have allergies to other legumes.)

Soy. Like peanuts, soybeans are legumes. Soy allergy is more common among babies than older children.

Wheat. Wheat proteins are found in many foods, and some are more obvious than others.

Although wheat allergy is often confused with celiac disease, there is a difference. Celiac disease is caused by a sensitivity to gluten, which is found in wheat, rye, and barley.

Other Common Allergens

Insect stings. For most kids, being stung by an insect means swelling, redness, and itching at the site of the bite. But for those with insect venom allergy, an insect sting can cause more severe symptoms.



Medicines. Antibiotics (used to treat infections) are the most common types of medicines that cause allergic reactions.

Chemicals. Sometimes, cosmetics or laundry detergents can cause an itchy rash. Usually, this is because someone has a reaction to the chemicals in these products.

Cross-reactions. Some kids also have what are called **cross-reactions**. For example, kids who are allergic to birch pollen might have symptoms when they eat an apple because that apple is made up of a protein similar to one in the pollen.

Signs and Symptoms

The type and severity of allergy symptoms vary from allergy to allergy and child to child. Allergies may show up as itchy eyes or an itchy nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, throat tightness, trouble breathing, vomiting, and even faintness or passing out. Severe allergic reactions (called anaphylaxis) can be fatal if not treated in time.

Airborne Allergy Symptoms

Airborne allergens can cause something known as allergic rhinitis.

Symptoms can include:

- sneezing
- itchy nose and/or throat
- nasal congestion
- coughing

These symptoms are often accompanied by itchy, watery, and/or red eyes, which is called **allergic conjunctivitis**. (When dark circles are present around the eyes, they're called allergic "shiners.")

Symptoms of Food, Medicines, or Insect Venom Allergies

- wheezing
- trouble breathing
- coughing
- hoarseness
- throat tightness
- stomachache
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- itchy, watery, or swollen eyes
- hives
- red spots
- swelling
- a drop in blood pressure, causing lightheadedness or loss of consciousness



Allergic reactions can differ. Sometimes the same person can react differently at different times. Some reactions are mild and involve only one system of the body, like hives on the skin. Other times the reaction can

be more severe and involve more than one part of the body. A mild reaction in the past does not mean that a future reaction will also be mild.

Diagnosing Allergies

Some allergies are fairly easy to identify because the pattern of symptoms following exposure to certain allergens can be hard to miss. But other allergies are less obvious because they can be similar to other conditions.

If your child has cold-like symptoms lasting longer than a week or two or develops a "cold" at the same time every year, consult your doctor, who will likely ask questions about the symptoms and when they appear. Based on the answers and a physical exam, the doctor might be able to make a diagnosis and prescribe medicines, or may refer you to an allergist for allergy tests and more extensive therapy.

To find the cause of an allergy, allergists usually do skin tests for the most common environmental and food allergens. A skin test can work in one of two ways:

1. A drop of a purified liquid form of the allergen is dropped onto the skin and the area is pricked with a small pricking device.
2. A small amount of allergen is injected just under the skin. This test stings a little but isn't extremely painful.

After about 15 minutes, if a lump surrounded by a reddish area appears (like a mosquito bite) at the injection site, the test is positive.

As an alternative test, blood tests may be used in children with skin conditions, those who are on certain medicines, or those who are extremely sensitive to a particular allergen.

Treating Allergies

There is no real cure for allergies, but it *is* possible to relieve symptoms. The only real way to cope with them is to reduce or eliminate exposure to allergens. That means that parents must educate their kids early and often, not only about the allergy itself, but also about the reactions they can have if they consume or come into contact with the allergen.

Informing any and all caregivers (childcare personnel, teachers, extended family members, parents of your child's friends, etc.) about your child's allergy is also important.



If reducing exposure to environmental allergens isn't possible or is ineffective, medicines may be prescribed, including antihistamines (which you can also buy over the counter), eye drops, and nasal sprays.

In some cases, an allergist may recommend immunotherapy (allergy shots) to help desensitize someone with an allergy. However, allergy shots are only helpful for allergens such as dust, mold, pollens, animals, and insect stings. They're not used for food allergies.

Here are some things that can help kids avoid airborne allergens:

Keep family pets out of certain rooms, like your child's bedroom.

Remove carpets or rugs from your child's room (hard floor surfaces don't collect dust as much as carpets do).

Don't hang heavy drapes and get rid of other items that allow dust to build up.

Clean when your child is not in the room.

Use special covers to seal pillows and mattresses if your child is allergic to dust mites.

For kids allergic to pollen, keep the windows closed when the pollen season is at its peak, change their clothing and bathe them after they've been outdoors, and don't let them mow the lawn.

Keep kids who are allergic to mold away from damp areas, such as some basements, and keep bathrooms and other mold-prone areas clean and dry.

Kids with food allergies need to completely avoid products made with their allergens. This can be tough as allergens can be found in many unexpected foods and products. Always read labels to see if a packaged food contains your child's allergen.

Cross-contamination means that the allergen is not one of the ingredients in a product, but might have contaminated it during production or packaging.

The good news is that only a very small group of kids will experience severe or life-threatening allergic reactions. With proper diagnosis, preventive measures, and treatment, most kids can keep their allergies in check and live happy, healthy lives.



This newsletter has been issued by:

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Psychology * Play Therapy * Counselling

Please note that this information must not be used for diagnostic purposes. Please visit a medical professional for a correct diagnosis.