

All about allergies



Allergies can hit at any age and various factors can trigger them. Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) is one of the most well-known types. It affects between 10-30% of the global population, according to the World Allergy Organisation. Other common types include asthma and allergic conjunctivitis (eye infection), as well as food, skin, and insect sting allergies.

Why do we get allergies?

Whether they're caused by pet hair, fabric softener, shellfish, a mosquito bite or pollen, allergies are quite common. They occur when the immune system overreacts to harmless substances. If you are allergic, your immune system has flagged 'innocent' substances as invaders and produced antibodies to detect them. The next time you're exposed to them, your immune system takes swift action and during this process, kick-starts those telltale allergy symptoms.

Why are some of us more allergy-prone?

A genetic predisposition is one of the main reasons why only some of us get allergies. According to the Harvard Medical School experts in their *What to do about Allergies* report, a child with one parent who has allergies has a 50% risk of developing allergies. And this risk increases to 70% if both the child's parents are allergy sufferers.

When are allergies dangerous?

Most of the time, allergy symptoms are inconvenient but not detrimental to your health. Symptoms can include, for example, an itchy nose, watery eyes, and a swollen insect bite. But

when an allergic reaction is severe, it can trigger anaphylaxis and cause you to go into shock.

The Mayo Clinic lists the following signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis:

- Loss of consciousness.
- A drop in blood pressure.
- Severe shortness of breath.
- Skin rash.
- Light-headedness.
- A rapid, weak pulse.
- Nausea and vomiting.

If you or someone you know experiences any of the symptoms mentioned above and suspects anaphylaxis, get to a hospital emergency room as soon as possible. Also, if you start to experience an allergic reaction soon after taking a new medication, it's best to call the prescribing medical professional and discuss your symptoms.

No matter at what age you develop allergies or what you're allergic to, remember that your body may just be trying to protect your health. Speak to your doctor about how you can support the process (especially when avoidance strategies aren't possible) and what long-term or seasonal treatment options are available to you.