

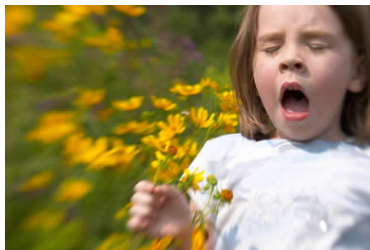


WELLNESS WORKS....

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

A Publication from Brain Injury Community Re-entry Niagara's Wellness Works Committee

July & August 2011



Allergies

Allergies are relatively common. Both genetics and environmental factors play a role. Severe allergic reactions occur when the body's immune system strongly reacts to a particular allergenic protein or irritant. The reactions may be caused by food, insect stings and medications.

On February 16th, 2011 Health Canada published amendments to the food allergen labeling regulations in the Canada Gazette, Part 11. Canada's new food allergen labeling regulations will come into force August 4th, 2012.

When someone comes in contact with an allergen, the symptoms of a reaction may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. The most severe form of an allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. Symptoms can include breathing difficulties, a drop in blood pressure or shock, which may result in loss of consciousness and even death. A person experiencing an allergic reaction may have any of the following symptoms:

- Flushed face, hives or a rash, red and itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue
- Trouble breathing, speaking or swallowing
- Anxiety, distress, faintness, paleness, sense of doom, weakness
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting

The immune system normally protects the body against harmful substances, such as bacteria and viruses. It also reacts to foreign substances called allergens, which are generally harmless and in most people do not cause a problem. But in a person with allergies, the immune response is oversensitive. Common allergens include: **pollen, mold, pet dander, and dust and food and drug allergies are common.** Allergic reactions can also be caused by **insect bites, jewelry, cosmetics, spices, and other substances.** Some people have allergy-like reactions to **hot or cold temperatures, sunlight, or other environmental triggers.** Sometimes, **friction** (rubbing or roughly stroking the skin) will cause symptoms.



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As many as 1.2 million Canadians may be affected by life-threatening food allergies and these numbers are increasing, especially among children. Currently, it is estimated that six per cent of children are affected by food allergies.

Although many foods can cause allergic reactions, Canada has identified a list of priority allergens that are responsible for the majority of allergic reactions to food in our country. These allergens are **peanuts, tree nuts, sesame, soy, seafood (such as fish, crustaceans and shellfish), wheat, eggs, milk and sulphites**. Reactions to these allergens among allergic individuals range from mild to severe. Trace amounts of these foods can potentially be found in a wide range of food products including snack foods, health foods, baked goods, seasonings, and many other foods.

There are several types of medications available to prevent and treat allergies. Which medicine your doctor recommends depends on the type and severity of your symptoms, your age, and overall health. Allergy shots are most effective when used to treat those with hay fever symptoms and severe insect sting allergies. They are not used to treat food allergies because of the danger of a severe reaction. Allergy shots may require years of treatment, but they work in most cases. However, they may cause uncomfortable side effects (such as hives and rash) and dangerous outcomes (such as anaphylaxis).

Currently there is no cure for food allergies. The only option is complete avoidance of the specific allergen. Appropriate emergency treatment for anaphylaxis (a severe food allergy reaction) includes an injection of adrenaline, which is available in an auto-injector device. Adrenaline must be administered as soon as symptoms of a severe allergic reaction appear. The injection must be followed by further treatment and observation in a hospital emergency room. If your allergist has diagnosed you with a food allergy and prescribed adrenaline, carry it with you all the time and know how to use it. Follow your allergist's advice on how to use an auto-injector device.

A food sensitivity is an adverse reaction to a food that other people can safely eat, and includes food allergies, food intolerances, and chemical sensitivities. In allergic individuals, a food protein is mistakenly identified by the immune system as being harmful. The first time the individual is exposed to such a protein, the body's immune system responds by creating antibodies called immunoglobulin E. When the individual is exposed again to the same food protein, IgE antibodies and chemicals such as histamine are released.

A food intolerance is a food sensitivity that does not involve the individual's immune system. Unlike food allergies, or chemical sensitivities, where a small amount of food can cause a reaction, it generally takes a more normal sized portion to produce symptoms of food intolerance. While the symptoms of food intolerance vary and can be mistaken for those of a food allergy, food intolerances are more likely to originate in the gastrointestinal system and are usually caused by an inability to digest or absorb certain foods, or components of those foods.

Celiac disease is an inherited intolerance to gluten. The main sources of gluten in the diet are cereal grains and the only current treatment for celiac disease is to continually maintain a strict gluten-free diet.

Chemical sensitivities occur when a person has an adverse reaction to chemicals that occur naturally in, or are added to, foods.

Minimize Your Risk

Know what foods or other factors trigger a reaction and avoid them. When eating out or in a restaurant, tell your host/server about your food allergy, and ask specific questions about the food to be served. Even if a dish does not contain the food you are allergic to, it still might have been in contact with it through utensils and cooking pans. When in doubt, **don't eat it!**

A specific allergy is not usually passed down through families (inherited). However, if both your parents have allergies, you are likely to have allergies. The chance is greater if your mother has allergies.

Some children may outgrow an allergy. This is particularly true of food allergies. However, as a general rule, once a substance has triggered an allergic reaction, it continues to affect the person.



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Food Allergies

peanuts
tree nuts
sesame
soy
seafood
wheat
eggs
milk
sulphites

Other Allergies

pollen
mold
pet dander
dust
insect stings
jewelry
sunlight

Allergy Rhinitis (Seasonal Hay Fever)

A common illness that affects millions of people and is caused by inhaling pollens, ragweed, trees, and grasses. Hay fever is generally a seasonal condition, often times worse in the spring and fall seasons.

Dust Mite

A dust mite allergy is an allergic reaction to a microscopic organism that lives in the dust that is found in most buildings and houses. Dust mites are a common cause of perennial allergic rhinitis. Dust mite allergy usually produces symptoms similar to pollen allergy and also can produce symptoms of asthma.

Mold Allergy

Mold allergies are most common during summer months. Mold is present in most indoor and outdoor spaces, and in many foods. It is a type of fungus that works to break down dead material and return nutrients to the environment. Mold grows by digesting plant or animal matter, such as leaves, wood, paper, dirt, and food and spreads by releasing tiny, lightweight spores that travel through the air. Mold grows quickly in moist dark spaces, such as basements, garbage cans, and piles of rotting leaves.

On food, mold often is visible on the food's surface, such as the fuzzy green spots that appear on bread. However, molds also have branches and roots. As it grows, the mold's roots can penetrate deep inside the food, where it cannot be seen.

Asthma

Inflammation of the lungs and airways possibly due to inhaled allergens or sensitivity to odors or chemicals. The allergic reactions can trigger asthma symptoms. The effects of asthma are generally temporary and include: shortness of breath, breathing troubles, or other allergy symptoms.

Allergic Eczema

Allergic Eczema (Atopic Dermatitis) is an allergic rash that is usually not caused by skin contact with an allergen. This condition is commonly associated with allergic rhinitis or asthma.

Allergies to Insect Stings

Bee, wasp, yellow jacket, hornet, or fire ant stings are the insect stings that most often trigger allergies. However, most people are not allergic to insect stings and may mistake a normal sting reaction for an allergic reaction. By knowing the difference, you can prevent unnecessary worry and visits to the doctor.

The severity of an insect sting reaction varies from person to person. There are three types of reactions normal, localized, and allergic:

- A normal reaction will result in pain, swelling, and redness around the sting site.
- A large local reaction will result in swelling that extends beyond the sting site. For example, a person stung on the ankle may have swelling of the entire leg. While it often looks alarming, it is generally no more serious than a normal reaction.
- The most serious reaction to an insect sting is an allergic one. This condition requires immediate medical attention.

People who have experienced an allergic reaction to an insect sting have a 60% chance of a similar or worse reaction if they are stung again.



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School Lunches

The beginning of the school year can be a very exciting time. Along with packing school supplies such as books and pencils, you'll also be packing school lunches for your children. While there are food safety tips that you should follow to avoid food borne illness, it's also important to remember allergy awareness when you are packing lunches for school. If your children pack their own lunches, you should help them understand how to be food allergy aware.

Pet Allergies

Eleven million people are allergic to cats alone. About 15% of us are allergic to an animal, the flakes from the animal's skin, called dander, not the fur is the cause. So even if it's a bald cat, you can be allergic. The animal's saliva on the fur from cleaning itself or on your skin from sloppy kisses can also incite a reaction. Pet urine can also be a culprit.

Latex Allergy

Latex, also known as rubber or natural latex, is derived from the milky sap of the rubber tree, found in Africa and Southeast Asia. Latex allergy is an allergic reaction to substances in natural latex. Rubber gloves are the main source of allergic reactions, although latex is also used in other products such as condoms and some medical devices.

Cosmetic Allergies

Products such as moisturizers, shampoos, deodorants, make-up, colognes, and other cosmetics have become part of our daily grooming habits. The American Academy of Dermatology reports the average adult uses at least seven different cosmetic products each day. Although cosmetics can help us feel more beautiful, they can cause skin irritation or allergic reactions. Certain ingredients used in cosmetics, such as fragrances and preservatives, can act as allergens, substances that trigger an allergic reaction.

References:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001815/>

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/>

Tips

Avoid foods to which you are allergic, learn to read the nutrition/ingredient labels and precautionary label on foods to prevent contact with even trace amounts of food you are allergic to. Call food manufactures if you have doubts about a particular food. Be very careful about bulk foods that may not carry a label or have cross-contamination.

If you know you react to a food allergen, always carry an epinephrine auto-injector with you, and know how to use it. If it is your child who is affected, teach them how to use it, and stress the importance of always having it with them. At the cottage or on a trip, be sure to keep one or more epinephrine auto-injectors on hand.

Use the epinephrine auto-injector at the earliest signs of a reaction. Practice using the epinephrine auto-injector every few months, and train other family members as well.

Always wear a MedicAlert identifier so that, in case of an accident, others know about your allergies and reactions. Children who are subject to severe reactions should be trained to read labels and ask questions before eating foods.