

Anaphylaxis – Patient Information

What is Anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction, usually with abrupt onset of symptoms. The reaction can manifest itself in the skin, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, and/or the gastrointestinal tract. The symptoms can occur singularly or in combination.

What Causes Anaphylaxis?

There are many agents that can cause anaphylaxis. Some common causes include allergic reactions to the following: food, insect sting, medication (including vaccines and antibiotics), latex, allergy injections (immunotherapy).

What are Common Symptoms?

- **Skin:** Hives are itchy welts that may be mild to severe and can be very uncomfortable. Angioedema is deep tissue swelling, usually involving the face.
- **Respiratory:** shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing, and/or cough
- **Laryngeal edema:** swelling of the voice box that can lead to hoarseness, difficulty breathing or swallowing
- **Gastrointestinal:** nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and/or diarrhea
- **Cardiovascular:** decrease in blood pressure that may lead to lightheadedness, fainting, and/or shock. Irregular heartbeat or heart attack may occur.
- **Uterine:** cramping in women

How Can Anaphylaxis Be Prevented?

Reactions can be severe. It is important to try to prevent them from happening. The following actions may help:

A. Food Allergy:

- Avoid all forms of foods that have caused allergic reactions.
- Read all food labels carefully.
- Educate family, teachers, friends, and care providers so that triggers can be avoided and appropriate treatment can be administered if needed.
- Teach a child to ask if foods contain an allergen.
- If you are unsure if a food is safe, firmly refuse it! When In Doubt - Do Not Eat It!
- Watch for hidden ingredients (e.g., plain M&Ms may contain peanut protein).
- Learn safe eating in restaurants. Ask waiter or chef about menu choices before ordering or eating.
- Wear a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace identifying your food allergy.
- If a product label says “may contain (the problem food)” or “manufactured in a facility or on shared equipment with (the problem food)”, it is necessary to avoid this product.

B. Medication Allergy:

- Carry a complete list of medication allergies with you.
- Inform healthcare providers and your pharmacist of your medication allergies.
- Avoid over-the-counter medications or prescriptions with multiple medication ingredients, since they may contain a drug to which you are sensitive.
- Read all labels carefully -- especially cold and flu remedies that may contain aspirin.
- Be aware of skin or eye drop preparations that may contain medications to which you are allergic.

C. Stinging Insects (Bees, Wasps, Hornets, Yellow Jackets, Fire Ants):

- Learn procedures to minimize chance of being stung or bitten.
- Allergy injections are available for treatment of insect sting allergy and fire ant sensitivity.

How Do You Treat Anaphylaxis?

- Have your written emergency plan in place.
- Ensure you have educated family, teachers, and care providers of the problem and how to treat it.
- Know the telephone number of your local emergency access (e.g., 911 in many communities).
- Check the expiration date of your allergy/emergency medications to make sure they are current.

Wear a Medic Alert Bracelet or Necklace.

- This should state what you are allergic to. Applications are on line at “www.medicalert.org”