

Allergies

Managing and understanding your child's allergy

50% of children in the UK have allergies. For parents it is a learning curve in understanding what to avoid and how to control and manage the allergy. Find out as much as you can. There are many types of allergies.

An allergy is when the body has a reaction to a protein such as foods, insect stings, pollens, house dust mite or another substance such as antibiotics. There are many common allergies. Some families seem to include more individuals with allergies than other families. Children born into families where allergies already exist show a higher than average chance of developing allergies themselves.

Allergic symptoms can affect the nose, throat, ears, eyes, airways, digestion and skin in mild, moderate or severe form. When a child first shows signs of an allergy it is not always clear what has caused the symptoms, or even if they have had an allergic reaction, since some allergic symptoms can be similar to other common childhood illnesses. Urticaria can be one of the first symptoms of an allergic reaction. If the reaction is severe, or if the symptoms continue to re-occur, it is important that you contact your GP.

Anaphylactic shock

Anaphylaxis is a dangerous type of allergic reaction which is most likely to be caused by particular foods, insect bites or medicines.

Early signs of allergic reaction:

- Swelling and itching; the face may be flushed and wheals or hives may erupt on the skin.
- Lip or facial swelling.
- Acute vomiting or abdominal pain.

Anaphylaxis or severe reactions:

- Difficulty breathing, coughing and/or wheezing.
- Loss of colour; cold and clammy.
- Loss of consciousness (may appear asleep).

Call 999 and tell the operator you think the child has anaphylaxis.

If available, an adrenaline injection should be given as soon as a serious reaction is suspected. If you already have an EpiPen or injection device, make sure you know the correct way to use it in advance of an emergency.

Spotting symptoms

This example shows areas where allergy sufferers may experience symptoms. Many of these symptoms can develop as a result of other common childhood illnesses. With an allergy, symptoms often appear more quickly or suddenly.

Eyes

Itchy eyes, watery eyes, prickly eyes, swollen eyes, 'allergic shiners' - dark areas under the eyes due to blocked sinuses.

Airways

Wheezy breathing, difficulty in breathing, coughing (especially at night time), shortness of breath.

Nose, throat and ears

Runny nose, blocked nose, itchy nose, sneezing, pain in sinuses, headaches, post-nasal drip (mucus drips down the throat from behind the nose), loss of sense of smell and taste, sore throat, swollen larynx (voice box), itchy mouth and/or throat, blocked ear and glue ear.

Skin

Urticaria - Wheals or hives, bumpy, itchy raised areas, rashes.

Eczema - Cracked, dry or weepy, broken skin.

Digestion

Swollen lips/tongue, stomach ache, feeling sick, vomiting, constipation, diarrhoea, bleeding from the bottom, reflux, poor growth.

Source: Allergy UK

1

Food allergies occur when the body's immune system reacts negatively to a particular food or food substance.

2

Allergens can cause skin reactions (such as a rash or swelling of the lips, face and around the eyes), digestive problems such as vomiting and diarrhoea, and hay-fever-like symptoms, such as sneezing.

3

Children are most commonly allergic to cow's milk, hen's eggs, peanuts and other nuts, such as hazelnuts and cashew.

Source: NICE - Testing for food allergy in children and young people