

A guide to allergy

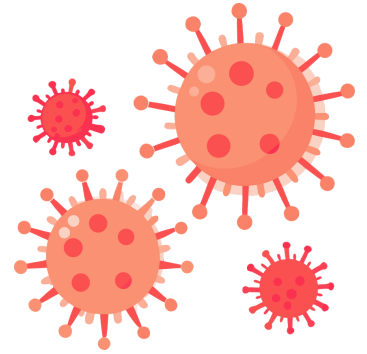
(including anaphylaxis, intolerances, and coeliac disease)

Allergies affect up to 21 million people in the UK, with 5–8% of children living with a food allergy. Some childhood allergies may disappear, but many last a lifetime.

They occur when the immune system reacts to normally harmless substances like pollen, food, or dust mites. Reactions can be mild, such as itching, or severe, causing anaphylaxis, a life-threatening condition that can block airways and cause collapse.

When an allergen enters the body, antibodies trigger the release of substances such as histamine, causing inflammation, swelling, and itching. Reactions usually occur within minutes of exposure.

Anaphylaxis requires immediate treatment with an adrenaline auto injector (AAI) more commonly known by the brand name EpiPen. Common triggers include certain foods such as peanuts, tree nuts, shellfish, insect stings, and some medications or contrast agents used in medical tests.

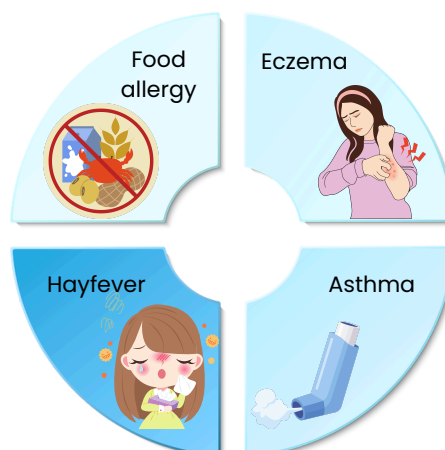


Causes of allergic reactions

People can be allergic to almost anything, but the most common causes of allergic reactions are:

- Pollen from trees and grasses
- Proteins secreted from house dust mites
- Moulds
- Foods such as peanuts, tree nuts, milk and eggs
- Pets such as cats and dogs, and other furry or hairy animals such as horses, rabbits and guinea pigs
- Insects such as wasps and bees
- Medicines

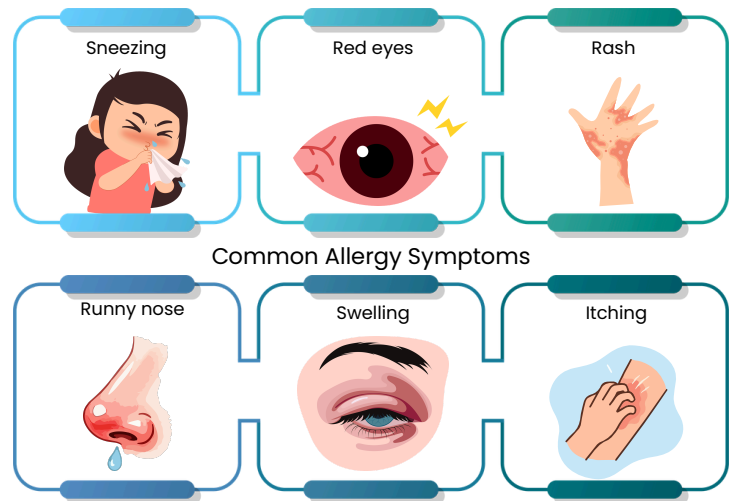
Common allergies and allergic conditions in children include food allergy, eczema, asthma and hay fever.



Symptoms of allergic reactions

Common symptoms of an allergic reaction include:

- Sneezing
- Wheezing, coughing or shortness of breath
- Sinus pain or a runny nose
- Nettle rash or hives
- Swelling
- Itchy eyes, ears, lips, throat and mouth
- Sickness, vomiting and diarrhoea

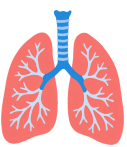


Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis can occur rapidly and escalate quickly, making it essential to recognise the signs and symptoms early on.

Signs of anaphylaxis include one or more of the following symptoms:

Symptoms of anaphylaxis

 Swollen lips		 Hives	Airway: Swollen tongue, difficulty swallowing, throat tightness, change in voice (hoarse/croaky)
 Swollen eyes	 Fast heart rate	 Shortness of breath or wheezing	Breathing: Difficulty breathing, chest tightness, noisy breathing, persistent cough or wheezing
			Circulation: Feeling dizzy or faint, collapse, loss of consciousness, pale and floppy (in babies/small children)

The most common causes of anaphylactic reactions include:

- Foods – including nuts, milk, fish, shellfish, eggs and some fruits
- Medicines and drugs – including some antibiotics and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like aspirin
- Insect stings – particularly wasp and bee stings
- General anaesthetic
- Contrast agents – dyes used in some medical tests to help certain areas of your body show up better on scans
- Latex – a type of rubber found in some rubber gloves, plasters and condoms.

How to manage an allergy

Avoiding allergens is the best protection, and medications can relieve symptoms but don't change the allergy itself. Allergies greatly affect daily life, as people must plan around safe foods, avoid risky situations, and carefully manage activities such as travel and social events to prevent reactions that could be severe or even fatal.



Several medicines available to help control symptoms of allergic reactions include:

- Antihistamines – these can be taken when you notice the symptoms of a reaction, or before being exposed to an allergen, to stop a reaction occurring
- Decongestants – tablets, capsules, nasal sprays or liquids that can be used as a short-term treatment for a blocked nose
- Lotions and creams, such as moisturising creams (emollients) – these can reduce skin redness and itchiness
- Steroid medicines – sprays, drops, creams, inhalers and tablets that can help reduce redness and swelling caused by an allergic reaction
- Adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) – devices designed to deliver a dose of adrenaline quickly and easily in case of a severe allergic reaction, such as anaphylaxis. These devices are compact, portable, and typically come in a pen-like form, making them convenient to carry and use during emergencies.

Allergy vs Intolerance

Food allergies and intolerances both involve reactions to certain foods, but in different ways. Allergies trigger the immune system and can be mild or life-threatening, while intolerances usually cause discomfort that lasts hours and are rarely dangerous. Common intolerances include lactose, gluten, alcohol, histamine, and wheat. Symptoms of a food intolerance usually develop a few hours after eating the trigger food and can persist for hours or even days. These may include:

- Bloating
- Stomach pain
- Diarrhoea
- Headache or migraine
- Nausea

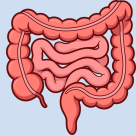


Food intolerances are generally managed by limiting or avoiding the foods and ingredients that cause symptoms.

Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disorder in which eating gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye, triggers the immune system to attack the small intestine, damaging its ability to absorb nutrients. Symptoms can include digestive problems like diarrhoea or bloating, fatigue, and anaemia, although some people may have no obvious symptoms.

The only treatment is a strict, lifelong gluten-free diet. Unlike a food allergy, coeliac disease causes delayed damage rather than sudden reactions. Unlike a food intolerance, which only causes discomfort because the body can't digest certain foods properly, coeliac disease can lead to serious long-term health problems if gluten is eaten.

Coeliac Disease	Food allergy	Food intolerance
Autoimmune disorder	Immune reaction	Digestive issue
 Gluten damages the intestines		
Symptoms: Digestive issues, fatigue, anaemia	Symptoms: Hives, swelling, anaphylaxis	Symptoms: Bloating, gas, diarrhoea
Diagnosis: Blood test, biopsy	Diagnosis: Allergy testing	Diagnosis: Elimination diet
Management  Gluten free diet	Management  Avoid allergen use epipen if needed	Management  Avoid problem food

How to support in unit meetings

- Keep up to date with first response training for any changes to the management of anaphylaxis.
- Speak with parents/guardians to be certain of the allergy triggers and severity.
- Complete an adjustment plan.
- If medication is used, make sure it is brought to meetings, especially in the case of adrenaline auto-injectors. Speak with parents/guardians about how and when to administer.
- Make sure all relevant leaders know what to do in an emergency, while respecting the members privacy.
- Consider what ingredients are used during cooking activities and provide safe alternatives. Also consider cross-contamination.
- If the allergy is severe, keep the item out of meetings completely.
- Remind members not to bring foods that could put another member at risk to meetings.

When planning activities, such as camps, remember to think about:

- Food and cooking activities
- Packed lunches and shared food
- Accommodation
- Insect stings and outdoor activities
- Cleaning products and first aid supplies (latex is common in plasters)
- Access to emergency medications

Access further support if needed

Remember you can get help with the costs for inclusive materials and resources. This may be available from your country, region, or with the accessible guiding grant from HQ.

Good planning can help a young person take part safely without unnecessarily restricting their activities.

Useful contacts



allergyuk.org



coeliac.org.uk