

Allergy FAQs

What is an allergy?

Allergies are an abnormal response of the immune system to a usually harmless substance called allergens. This response releases a chemical within the body called histamine, which allows you to feel common allergy symptoms.

What are common allergens?

Grass, tree and weed pollens, mold, dust mites and pet dander are most common.

What are common symptoms of an allergic reaction?

Itchy or watery eyes, sneezing, itchy throat, runny nose and rashes are most common. Most symptoms will subside after the body is no longer exposed to that allergen. The most severe reaction is anaphylaxis, characterized by shortness of breath, tightness in the throat, rapidly swelling tongue, nausea, abdominal cramps, uterine cramps sense of impending doom and a spreading rash. This reaction is life threatening so seek immediate medical attention if you are experiencing these symptoms. Epinephrine is the treatment of choice should these symptoms occur following an immunotherapy injection.

What happens during an allergic reaction?

When exposed to an allergen, the body starts to produce a specific type of antibody, called IgE. Together the allergen, IgE and blood cell (specifically mast cells) join causing the mast cells to release a variety of chemicals into the blood. Histamine, the main chemical, causes most of the symptoms of an allergic reaction.

What allergens are seasonal?

In spring, the blossoming of flowers, plants and trees means pollen is high.

In summer, grass allergens can be most common during these typically dry air months.

In fall, bad weather like rain and wind cause mold and weed pollen to be prevalent.

In winter, pollen levels are lower, but people also experience more indoor allergies since they're not outside as much.

How many people suffer from allergies?

More than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies.

What is the most prevalent chronic disease?

It's asthma and allergies - striking 1 of 5 Americans. This is higher than cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

What is the economic cost to allergies?

This disease costs more than \$7.9 billion per year, most of which is spent on direct care and the rest relating to lost work productivity.

What types of treatment are there?

You can try to avoid or control your environment to lessen allergen interactions, treat with pharmaceuticals or immunotherapy. Immunotherapy is the only known disease-modifying treatment for allergies and has lasting results when the course of therapy is completed.

What is immunotherapy?

Allergen immunotherapy is a form of treatment aimed at decreasing your sensitivity to substances called allergens. Immunotherapy involves introducing increasing amounts of an allergen to a patient over several months.