



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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## Allergies

Allergies are hypersensitivity reactions of the immune system to specific substances (allergens, such as pollen, stings, drugs, smoke or foods). Symptoms due to respiratory allergies may include runny, itchy eyes, stuffy nose, earache, painful face, sore throat, hoarseness, cough, and wheezing.

Most symptoms of respiratory allergies occur because of irritation to the respiratory mucosa. The mucosa is the thin red membrane that lines the eyes, nose, inside of the mouth, the sinuses (hollows in the facial structures), and the whole respiratory tree. The mucosa is a very sensitive membrane and it swells and pours out fluid when irritated by anything—viral or bacterial infections, smoke, perfume, or animal dander.

The fluid from the mucosa causes runny eyes and a runny nose, sinus congestion, and drips down the back of the throat (post-nasal drip) onto the vocal cords and down the trachea causing hoarseness. The muscles surrounding the bronchi (the tubes branching off the trachea leading to the

lungs) can often go into spasm and cause wheezing.

### What can you do if you start to experience allergic reactions?

Over the counter anti-histamines, Benadryl or Chlortrimeton are very effective in reducing allergic symptoms. They may be mildly sedating. Claritin, a non-sedating antihistamine, can be purchased over the counter. Nasalcrom, purchased over the counter, also helps prevent the allergic reaction from even starting, and has few side effects. Opcon A for allergic reaction of the eyes is very effective and a nasal decongestant like Sudafed can relieve nasal symptoms.

If the sedating side effects of some of the over-the-counter drugs become too bothersome or the drugs are ineffective, there are some prescription medications that are very effective at treating allergy symptoms. These drugs, however, are relatively expensive.

To stop a recurrence of allergy symptoms, stay away from things you know you are allergic to—dogs, cats, perfumes, food, pollen, or smoke. Smoke irritates the mucous

membrane and starts the allergic cycle.

If allergic symptoms are recurrent and severe, an evaluation by an allergist may be recommended for possible allergy shots to desensitize a person from specific allergens.

Some people may experience an extreme allergic reaction. This can result in a shock-like reaction (anaphylaxis) and death could occur. These reactions are usually to insect stings or particular foods. A person with a known serious allergy and/or a history of anaphylactic reactions, should always wear a MedicAlert bracelet and carry an Epi-Pen to help counter the reaction until emergency medical treatment can be given. You need a prescription by your physician to obtain the Epi-Pen.

MedicAlert's logo is recognized by emergency responders around the world and is engraved with a personal ID number and essential medical condition to ensure fast, accurate treatment that can save your life. For more information, call the toll-free number 1-800-432-5378 and register today.

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