

ALLERGIES

An allergy is a reaction by your immune system to something that does not bother most other people. People who have allergies often are sensitive to more than one thing. Substances that often cause reactions are:

- Pollen
- Dust mites
- Mold spores
- Pet dander
- Food
- Insect stings
- Medicines



Normally, your immune system fights germs. It is your body's defense system. In most allergic reactions, however, it is responding to a false alarm. Genes and the environment probably both play a role.

Each spring, summer, and fall, trees, weeds, and grasses release tiny pollen grains into the air. Some of the pollen ends up in your nose and throat. This can trigger a type of allergy called hay fever. Hay fever is the most common form of allergy, affecting 1 in 5 people. Your health care provider may diagnose hay fever based on a physical exam and your symptoms.

Symptoms can include:

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Itching (mostly eyes, nose, mouth, throat and skin)
- Runny nose
- Stuffy nose
- Headache
- Pressure in the nose and cheeks
- Ear fullness and popping
- Sore throat
- Watery, red or swollen eyes
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Hives or rashes
- Trouble smelling
- Asthma

Sometimes skin or blood tests are used. Allergies can range from minor to severe. Anaphylaxis is a severe reaction that can be life-threatening. Taking medicines and using nasal sprays can relieve symptoms. You can also rinse out your nose, but be sure to use distilled or sterilized water with saline. Allergy shots can help make you less sensitive to pollen and provide long-term relief.