

Allergies



WHAT IS AN ALLERGY?

Allergic disorders are very common in Australia and there are many different types of allergies that present with a variety of symptoms. An allergen is a substance that has the potential to cause an allergic reaction in allergic or sensitised people.

Common sources of allergens include:

- **Animal dander (dead skin cells and hair):** From cats, dogs, horses, rabbits and guinea pigs, for example.
- **Food:** For example eggs, fish, crustaceans and molluscs, peanuts, tree nuts (e.g. almonds, cashews, pecans and walnuts), milk, wheat, soy and sesame seeds and other seeds (allergies to other foods may also occur).
- **Arthropods:** House dust mites.
- **Insect venoms:** From bees, wasps and ants.
- **Medicines:** For example, antibiotics such as penicillin (allergies to other medicines may also occur).
- **Moulds:** Mould spores.
- **Plants:** Pollens from grasses, weeds and trees.
- **Chemical and contact allergens:** Such as those found in occupational chemicals.

WHO SUFFERS FROM ALLERGIES?

Allergic disorders affect around one in three people in Australia at some point in their life¹. They may affect people of any age, and reactions may range from mild to severe. Fortunately if you have an allergy, diagnosis and treatment options are usually available.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN ALLERGY?

The symptoms that you experience from an allergic reaction will depend on the type of substance you are allergic to and how you have been exposed to the substance.

For example, when allergens such as pollens, dust mites, mould spores, or animal dander are inhaled, you may experience symptoms in the nose, eyes, sinuses, throat and chest (including asthma in some people).

Allergy to foods may lead to hives, swelling, breathing and abdominal symptoms, or even life-threatening allergy (anaphylaxis). Allergic reactions can involve several parts of the body at the same time¹.

Regions affected may include:

- **Nose and eyes:** When allergens are breathed in the lining of your nose produces lots of mucus and may become swollen and inflamed. This causes your nose to run and itch, and violent sneezing may occur. Other symptoms can include watery and itchy eyes, and an itchy throat.
- **Airways and chest:** Asthma can sometimes be triggered during an allergic reaction. Bronchial inflammation and narrowing (bronchospasm) may cause wheezing. Swelling in the upper airway may cause difficulty breathing or the airways to become blocked, in cases of severe allergy (anaphylaxis).
- **Stomach and bowel:** Ingesting an allergen can cause digestive problems, bloating, constipation or diarrhoea, and in infants, malabsorption and failure to thrive.
- **Skin:** Eczema (an itchy dermatitis) and urticaria (hives) can be contributed to by allergy.

HOW IS AN ALLERGY DIAGNOSED?

There are a number of ways that your doctor may choose to investigate your allergy. Your doctor will be able to advise on which course of action is appropriate for your situation. Blood tests for allergy are available at QML Pathology collection centres with a doctor referral.

HOW MUCH WILL TESTING COST?

The cost of allergy testing will depend on the type of testing you are referred for. You may be eligible to receive a Medicare rebate for allergy testing, subject to Medicare guidelines and criteria. Speak to your doctor about your eligibility for a Medicare rebate.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

While there is not yet a cure, there are treatments and methods available to control and manage allergic disease. This may include minimising exposure to allergens, managing symptoms with medications, and/or allergen immunotherapy (desensitisation). Once the allergy triggers are identified, an appropriate treatment plan can be provided. You may be referred to an immunologist who specialises in the diagnosis and management of allergic and immunological disorders. A current list of specialists can be found on the website of The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) at www.allergy.org.au²

REFERENCES

1. The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) What is an allergy? <http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/about-allergy/what-is-allergy>
2. The Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA): Allergy and Clinical Immunology Services in Australia and New Zealand. <http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/allergy-andclinical-immunology-services>.



To find your local collection centre: visit qml.com.au, or scan this QR code using a smart phone app.

**For further information,
please speak with your doctor.**

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