

# Please... tell me about Allergies!

## About Allergies

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to something that normally shouldn't cause a reaction. The substance we are reacting to is called an allergen. In most people, the body's immune system recognizes allergens as harmless and deals with them without our even being aware of them. In the allergic person, however, something goes wrong. The immune system malfunctions and "over reacts" to the allergen as if it is dangerous to the body. This reaction results in the symptoms we associate with allergies.

## What are the symptoms of allergies?

- Sneezing
- Watery/Itchy eyes
- Headaches
- Cold symptoms
- Persistent cough that won't go away
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Chronic stuffy nose
- Recurrent sinus infections
- Recurrent ear infections
- Skin rashes
- Asthma symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and tightness in chest.



Many factors can affect the seriousness of allergy problems: good nutrition, exercise, environmental problems and exposure to irritants such as tobacco smoke and perfumes, even emotions and stress can play a part in some allergies. It is important to note carefully when, where and under precisely what circumstances your symptom occur. You might want to take a moment now and jot down any information you have in this regard.

### **Can anyone become allergic?**

Yes, although children and young adults generally seem to most affected. Also, development of an allergy to a particular substance is an acquired condition. You are not born with an allergy, but only with the capacity to develop one.

### **Can Asthma be due to an allergy?**

Yes, frequently. It is one of the more complex allergy diseases, with approximately 10 million sufferers.

### **When should you consult an allergist?**

If allergy problems are mild and occur only occasionally, they may respond to simple forms of treatment that can be administered by almost any physician. If however, allergy problems are chronic, fail to respond to simple treatments, interfere with optimal functioning, or affect the quality of life, then an allergist should be consulted.

### **What are the most common allergies?**

- Tree pollen
- House dust
- Weed pollen
- Animal hair and dander
- Grass pollen
- Insect venom
- Foods
- Chemicals, including drugs
- Molds
- Contact Allergens
- Dyes/cosmetics
- Certain plant oleoresins

### **How do you know if you are allergic to something?**

Sometimes it is obvious. For instance, if you get red and watery eyes, runny nose and sneezy when a cat jumps into your lap, you can assume that you are allergic to most cats. In a majority of situations, however, you should be very careful in interpreting your observations as to what causes your allergic condition. For example, it's not the highly visible golden rod, but the ragweed that causes most allergy symptoms during the fall season. Also, you might blame a certain food for your skin rash and stop eating it. In reality, however, rather than this food, another ingredient in the dish could be the culprit. Without seeking an expert opinion, to rigidly limit your diet because you suspect food allergies will not only cause unnecessary hardship, it might even lead to nutritional deficiencies. The first step for an allergist to sort out the confusion as to whether you have any allergies and what are the inciting agents, is to obtain a detailed medical and environmental history. The doctor will then perform a thorough examination of the affected areas. Once it is established that there is enough ground to suspect significant allergies, he will attempt to find out the specific allergies to which you are sensitive. The most commonly used procedure for this purpose is allergy skin testing.

**Dr. Rayasam Prasad V MD**

**Allergy & Asthma Specialists**