



Allergies: The Basics

While many allergies are permanent, some can be outgrown, such as soy and dairy allergies. If you think you have outgrown an allergy, have allergy testing done.

Allergies are negative reactions that occur as a result of coming into contact with a normally harmless substance. These substances, or allergens, can be inhaled, injected, ingested or even simply touched to cause reactions.

Symptoms

Allergy symptoms often go unrecognized. You may falsely believe you have a cold or the flu, when really you are experiencing symptoms of an allergy. While the symptoms are similar, allergies can be differentiated. Common symptoms include sneezing, stuffy nose and itchy, watery eyes.

Risk Factors

Allergies can develop at any age. People who are most susceptible include those under age 40 who have at least one parent with allergies. Allergies can change or disappear over time, while others may recur at the same time each year, lasting for a few weeks or months each time.

Prevention

Allergists can perform skin tests to determine which substances are causing the skin to have adverse reactions. Avoiding those allergens can help alleviate some symptoms, as can these preventive measures:

- Stay indoors on days when pollen counts are high.
- Keep your home as clean and dust-free as possible.
- Learn about the benefits of a home air purifier.
- Put pillows and mattresses in allergen-proof encasements.
- Use a vacuum cleaner that has double bags or allergen-trapping bags.

- Avoid having dogs and cats in your home if you are allergic to pet dander.
- Choose hardwood floors with washable area rugs rather than wall-to-wall carpeting.

Allergy Treatment

Treatment for most allergies is available both over-the-counter and by prescription. Your doctor may suggest several treatment methods:

- Antihistamine medications work by blocking the effects of histamines, the chemicals that cause many allergy symptoms. Keep in mind that antihistamines may also cause drowsiness.
- Nasal sprays often help to reduce nasal inflammation, congestion, sneezing and runny nose.
- Decongestants help dry up nasal passages and reduce the swelling that causes stuffiness.

If your allergy symptoms are severe or chronic, you may need a series of allergy shots. Contact your physician or allergist to determine which treatment option is best suited for your particular allergy symptoms.

