

Allergies 101

Based on: <https://acaai.org/allergies/allergies-101/>

What are allergies?

Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to an “allergen” — a usually-harmless foreign substance such as dust, pollen, pet dander, or food. Your immune system responds to these allergens by trying to fight them off like a germ or virus, which causes physical symptoms such as sneezing, itching, hives, shortness of breath, and more. These physical symptoms can range from mild symptoms like sneezing or itching to anaphylaxis, a severe, life-threatening reaction.

How can I tell if I have allergies?

Do you get a stuffy nose and itchy eyes when spring flowers start to bloom? Do you get hives from petting your friend's dog? Do you get dizzy or nauseous when you eat fish? Sneezing, wheezing, itching, swelling, difficulty swallowing, stomach cramps, vomiting and more can all be symptoms of allergies. You may notice that you experience these symptoms at certain times of the year, in certain environments, or when you eat certain foods. An allergist can help you identify your specific allergic triggers and make a plan for managing your symptoms.

How common are allergies?

Allergies are very common in both children and adults. According to the CDC, more than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies each year, and allergic conditions are the 6th most common cause of chronic illness in the U.S. Around 4% of adults in the U.S. have food allergies, along with 4-6% of children.

How do I treat my allergies?

Allergists are specially trained to diagnose and treat your allergies so that you can take back control of your life. They will conduct testing to identify your allergic triggers and work with you on a plan to help you avoid your allergens and manage your symptoms. They may also prescribe medication or allergy immunotherapy.

What are some common allergies?

There are many different types of allergies. Some people are allergic to dust, pet dander, pollen or mold. Others are allergic to latex, or certain drugs or insect stings.

Food allergies are also common. Any food can cause an allergic reaction, but the eight most common food allergens are eggs, milk, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy.