

# Preparing for an allergic reaction

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Allergic reactions can range from irritating sneezing fits to life-threatening episodes. An allergy specialist with Baylor College of Medicine gives tips for preparing yourself and loved ones for allergic reactions.

"Even the mildest of reactions are considered [allergic reactions](#)," said Dr. Sanjiv Sur, director and professor of allergy medicine at Baylor.

"When a person comes in contact with an allergen, the body produces antibodies called immunoglobulin E directed against that [allergen](#) in large quantities. This overproduction causes the release of chemicals in the body that in turn leads to people experiencing stuffy noses, itchy eyes, skin rashes, cramping in the gut, breathing difficulty, or even anaphylaxis."

Sur recommends everyone make an appointment with an allergist to get tested to learn what they are allergic to. These tests can tell which kinds of pollen, mold, animal dander, food and even medications will incite a reaction and the severity of the reaction.

For allergies to pollens, molds and animal dander, [allergy shots](#), a form of immunotherapy, are popular with people who own pets as they train the immune system to become accustomed to [animal protein](#) that causes the reaction; however, this process takes about six months to show benefit, and must be maintained for 3–4 years after the regimen begins to have a sustained beneficial effect after stopping the shots.

"People with food or medicine allergies typically react more severely than those with just seasonal allergies," Sur said. "If you experience a severe allergic reaction, it is always a good idea to let your primary care physician or allergist know that you experienced an event." For allergy to foods and medications, Sur says avoidance of your allergy triggers is the best strategy.

For mild reactions to foods or a medication, an over-the-counter antihistamine suggested by your allergist can be effective in reducing the symptoms. For severe reactions, an epinephrine injection prescription is mandatory and must always be on hand. The injection can be administered into the outer side of thigh. If an epinephrine injection has

been administered, dial 911 or emergency services and ensure that the affected person is easily accessible to medical professionals.

People affected by allergens in the air, such as pollen, mold and pet dander, typically experience milder symptoms such as sneezing and itchy eyes, but they can escalate. Chronic pulmonary diseases, such as asthma, cause difficulty in breathing and may require inhalers containing a combination of steroids and a bronchodilator to reduce inflammation in your airways or the use of emergency nebulizers for severe asthma attacks. Asthma can be triggered by exposure to allergens and [viral infections](#) that impact the immune system and the body's reaction to allergens.

"What you are allergic to and how serious of a reaction you will have can change over time, so if you believe this happening to you, make an appointment with an allergist to get confirmation," Sur said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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