



My Drift

Title: Allergies

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An allergy is when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance, called an allergen. It could be something you eat, inhale into your lungs, inject into your body or touch. This reaction could cause coughing, sneezing, itchy eyes, a runny nose and a scratchy throat. In severe cases, it can cause rashes, hives, low blood pressure, breathing trouble, asthma attacks and even death.



There is no cure for allergies. But you can manage them with prevention and treatment. More Americans than ever say they manage allergies. It is among the country's most common, but overlooked, diseases.

Here are some allergies facts and statistics:

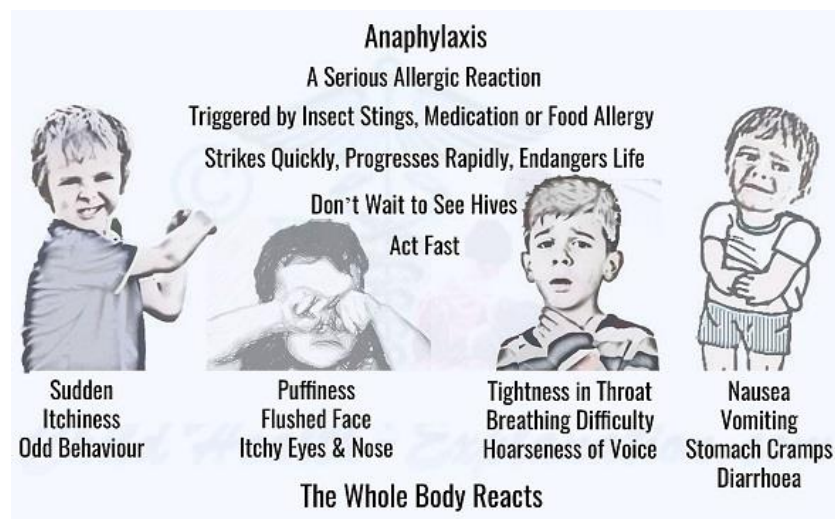
- More than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies each year.
- Women suffer more frequently from allergies, at 35.8%, than men (24.1%). Allergic diseases strike 26.6% of children and adolescents.
- Allergic conditions are the most common health issues affecting children in the U.S.
- Allergies are the 6th leading cause of chronic illness in the U.S.
- The most common allergic disease is Allergic rhinitis (hay fever), followed by asthma, atopic dermatitis and contact allergies.
- Around 8.2 percent of adults and 8.4 percent of children are diagnosed with hay fever each year.
- Hay fever causes symptoms such as sneezing, stuffy nose, runny nose, watery eyes and itching of the nose, eyes or the roof of the mouth. Hay fever can be seasonal or perennial:
 - Symptoms of seasonal hay fever occur in spring, summer and/or early fall. They are usually caused by allergic sensitivity to pollens from trees, grasses or weeds, or to airborne mold spores.



- People with perennial hay fever experience symptoms year-round. It is generally caused by sensitivity to house dust mites, animal dander, cockroaches and/or mold spores. Underlying or hidden food allergies rarely cause perennial nasal symptoms.
- Once diagnosed, hay fever treatment options are avoidance, eliminating or decreasing your exposure to the irritants or allergens that trigger your symptoms, medication and immunotherapy (allergy shots).
- People visit the emergency room about 200,000 times each year because of food allergies.



- **How Many People Die from Allergies? At least 2,500 deaths due to anaphylaxis and additional 600 deaths due to fatal allergic reactions were identified over the last 12 years.**



- **The most common triggers for anaphylaxis, a life-threatening reaction, are medicines, food, insect or bee stings, and unknown allergens.**
- **Skin allergies include skin inflammation, eczema, hives and contact dermatitis. Plants like poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac are the most common skin allergy triggers. But skin contact with cockroaches and dust mites, certain foods or latex may also cause skin allergy symptoms.**
- **The annual cost of allergies to the health care system and businesses in the U.S. is estimated at \$18 billion.**

These facts and statistics tell us that a lot of people have allergies. About a third of American women and a fourth of the men and a fourth of the children.

Well, late in life, I may have developed some kind of allergy where I will sometimes break out in hives (urticaria) on my upper body and arms. Usually they go away in a few days but once in a while they are bad enough that I go see my dermatologist.

This is me back in 2011 after breaking out with hives.



The only medicine that I have found that makes the hives go away fast is Prednisone. This is a steroid with possible bad side effects, but it works. Prednisone (Corticosteroid) is used on a short-term basis to help relieve the swelling, redness, and itching.

My previous doctor (who recently retired) sent me to an allergist who thought that I had an allergy. However, he run every allergy test in the book and could not find what was causing my hives. He admitted that this was the case with most (about 80%) allergy patients and the best he could do was try to control it with over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription drugs. The three drugs he wanted me to take are:

- 1. Zyrtec Allergy (drug name is Cetirizine) is an OTC antihistamine that blocks histamine, a symptom-causing chemical released by your immune system during an allergic reaction. Oral antihistamines ease a runny nose, itchy or watery eyes, hives, swelling, and other signs or symptoms of allergies.**
- 2. Ranitidine (Zantac) is a prescription histamine (H-2) blocker medication.**
- 3. Hydroxyzine (Vistaril) is a prescription drug used to treat itching caused by allergies. It is an antihistamine and works by blocking a certain natural substance (histamine) that your body makes during an allergic reaction. Hydroxyzine, Ranitidine and Zyrtec work together to prevent hives.**



The plan was to take these three meds for a few months and if I didn't have any hive problems, stop taking them. This is what I did, and I went about a year without breaking out with hives. However, in recent years, I've had the hives a couple of times a year. A few weeks ago, my hives come back so I went to see my new dermatologist. He agreed with the drugs my previous doctors gave me including Prednisone to quickly relieve the itching and get rid of the hives. Then he prescribed the above three drugs to control the hives from coming back.

My doctor also ordered an allergy blood test. On 13 Jun 2019, I went to my dermatologist to get the lab results. Doctor told me that he had good news and bad news. The good news was I'm not allergic to anything they tested. This was great news because if I was allergic to beer or dogs, I would just have to live with the hives. The bad news was the doctor had no idea what was causing my hives. So, it looks like I just have to live with the hives after all.

The only high number on my lab results was Immunoglobulin E (IgE) at 286.3 IU/ML. IgE are antibodies produced by the immune system. If you have an allergy, your immune system overreacts to an allergen by producing antibodies called Immunoglobulin E (IgE). These antibodies travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction. This reaction usually causes symptoms in the nose, lungs, throat, or on the skin. In my case, it is hives.

My doctor said he expected a high IgE reading because I had the hives when they took the blood at the Diagnostic Lab. If I had my blood tested today, my IgE would be under 100 IU/ML which is normal.

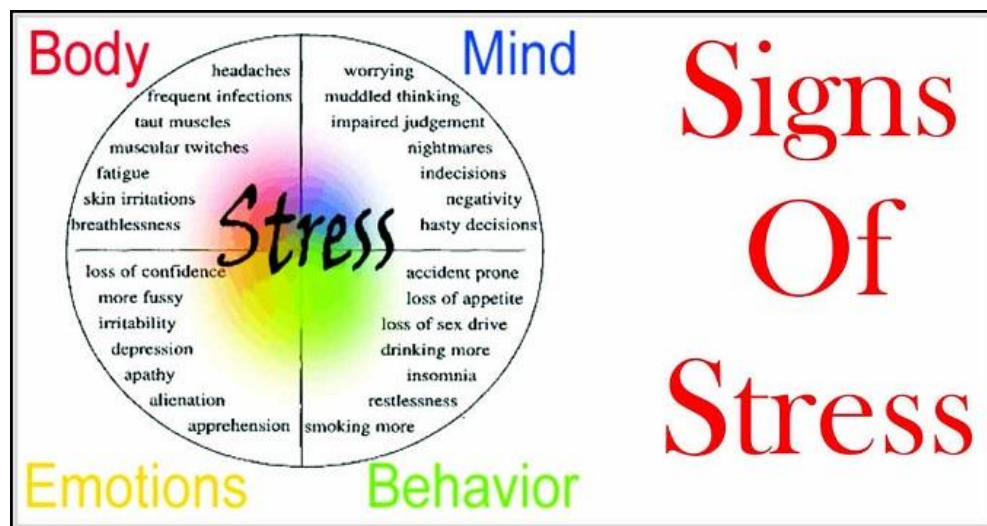
What else can cause hives?

Since none of the normal allergens are causing my hives, what other causes are there? Here is the short list:

- Physical stimuli, such as pressure, cold, heat, exercise (sweating) or sun exposure
- Bacterial or viral or fungal infections
- Emotional stress

I don't think I could have had an infection in my body for the last 30+ years without me knowing about it. That leaves physical stimuli and emotional stress. I think we can rule out pressure and cold – hey, I live in Hawaii. The primary exercise I get now days is walking the dog, cleaning the swimming pool and some yard work but I do work up a sweat doing these things out in the sun. So, my hives could be caused by heat, sweating, sun exposure and/or emotional stress.

I have had and still do have some stress in my life. During my working years for the Federal Government, I traveled a lot to countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, and Korea. There were times when things got a little stressful like during the student riots in Seoul and the bloody coup attempts in the Philippines. My wife has had health issues since her heart attack and bypass surgery in 1999. She has had multiple heart failures resulting in many trips to the ER and the hospital. About two years ago, her kidneys failed, and she is currently on dialysis.



Yes, my hives are probably caused by stress. You know you're experiencing stress when your heartbeat quickens, you breathe faster, you sweat, and feel anxious. But then again, my hives could be caused by any one or a combination of the above factors. Or it could be something completely unknown causing my hives. **Who knows? Not me or the doctors.**

This latest bout with hives is not the only time I ever had skin problems. In the mid-1980s, I went TDY to the Philippines three times and managed to pick up a mysterious rash on both of my feet and hands. This rash stayed with me for about three years. I went to three dermatologists and none of them could cure my skin problem. The general consensus was I had an unknown strain of eczema that didn't respond to any known treatments. I heard that acupuncture had been used successfully to treat skin disorders, so I tried that too - sticking needles into my body didn't work either!



I was beginning to think this rash was going to be with me for the rest of my life. Then one day while I was TDY to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, I was sightseeing in the old west town of Tombstone, when I saw this Indian Witch Doctor's Office. As a last resort, I walked in and showed the Indian Witch Doctor the rash on my feet and hands. He took me into the back room and threw some plants (that looked like weeds) and some colorful powder into a tub of water. He then had me soak my feet and hands in that solution for about five minutes. Next, he gave me a little rock (stress stone) and told me to rub it whenever I felt nervous. As I was leaving his office, he told me the rash would be gone by the next morning. It was!! I will never "knock" Indian Witch Doctors again. I need to find that Stress Stone!!



Stress Stone

I got a little side-tracked again, but I hope you enjoyed reading about my skin problems. Let's get back to the article topic – Allergies.

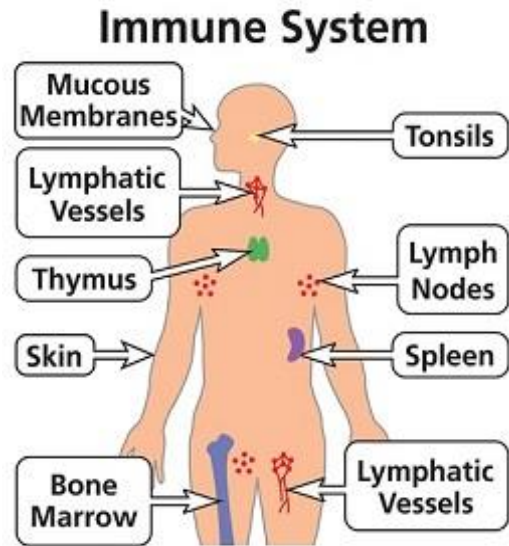
How Do Allergies Happen?

An allergy happens when the immune system overreacts to an allergen, treating it as an invader and trying to fight it off. This causes symptoms that can range from annoying to serious or even life-threatening.

Some allergies are seasonal and happen only at certain times of the year (like when pollen counts are high); others can happen anytime someone comes in contact with an allergen. So, when a person with a food allergy eats that particular food or someone who's allergic to dust mites is exposed to them, they will have an allergic reaction.

In an attempt to protect the body, the immune system makes antibodies called immunoglobulin E (IgE). These antibodies then cause certain cells to release chemicals (including histamine) into the bloodstream to defend against the allergen "invader."

It's the release of these chemicals that causes allergic reactions. Reactions can affect the eyes, nose, throat, lungs, skin, and gastrointestinal tract. Future exposure to that same allergen will trigger this allergic response again.



Who Gets Allergies?

The tendency to develop allergies is often hereditary, which means it can be passed down through genes from parents to their kids. But just because you, your wife/husband, or one of your children might have allergies doesn't mean that all of your kids will definitely get them. And someone usually doesn't inherit a particular allergy, just the likelihood of having allergies.

Some kids have allergies even if no family member is allergic, and those who are allergic to one thing are likely to be allergic to others.

What Things Cause Allergies?

Common Airborne Allergens

Some of the most common things people are allergic to are airborne (carried through the air):



Dust Mite



Pollen



Mold

Dust mites are microscopic insects that live all around us and feed on the millions of dead skin cells that fall off our bodies every day. They're the main

allergic component of house dust. Dust mites are present year-round in most parts of the United States and live in bedding, upholstery, and carpets.

Pollen is a major cause of allergies (a pollen allergy is often called hay fever). Trees, weeds, and grasses release these tiny particles into the air to fertilize other plants. Pollen allergies are seasonal, and the type of pollen someone is allergic to determines when symptoms happen.

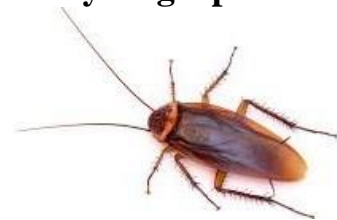
Molds are fungi that thrive both indoors and outside in warm, moist environments. Outdoors, molds can be found in poor drainage areas, such as in piles of rotting leaves or compost piles. Indoors, molds thrive in dark, poorly ventilated places such as bathrooms and damp basements.

Pet allergens are caused by pet dander (tiny flakes of shed skin) and animal saliva. When pets lick themselves, the saliva gets on their fur. As the saliva dries, protein particles become airborne and work their way into fabrics in the home. Pet urine also can cause allergies in the same way when it gets on airborne fur or skin, or when a pet pees in a spot that isn't cleaned.



My Dog Apache

Cockroaches are also a major household allergen, especially in inner cities. Exposure to cockroach-infested buildings may be a major cause of the high rates of asthma in inner-city kids.



Cockroach

Common Food Allergens

It is estimated that 32 million Americans have food allergies, including 5.6 million children under age 18. That's one in 13 children! Eight foods account for most of those: cow's milk, eggs, fish and shellfish, peanuts and tree nuts, soy products and wheat.

Cow's milk. An allergy to cow's milk and related dairy products affects one in 50 in babies and is different to lactose intolerance. Very few adults are allergic to cow's milk

Eggs. Did you know that eggs are one of the most common causes of food allergies? For people with an egg allergy, avoiding eggs and foods that contain eggs while still eating a healthy diet is important. An egg allergy is a reaction to

the proteins found in eggs. Your body's immune system reacts to the egg proteins (mostly in egg whites) and then triggers a variety of symptoms that include:

- Flushed face and body
- Itchy eyes, nose, face and skin
- Tingling, numbness or pain in the lips and tongue
- Hives
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
- Wheezing, coughing

Fish and shellfish. Seafood allergy is the most common food allergy in adults and among the six most prevalent food allergies in young children. The term "seafood" encompasses the following:

- Vertebrate finned fish, such as salmon, tuna, and cod
- Crustaceans, such as shrimp, prawn, crab, lobster, and crawfish
- Mollusks, such as squid, snails, and bivalves (scallops, clams, oysters, mussels, and others)

Peanuts and tree nuts. Peanut allergies are on the rise, and as are allergies to tree nuts, such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, and cashews. Most people do not outgrow peanut or tree nut allergies.

Peanuts are not the same as tree nuts (almonds, cashews, walnuts, etc.), which grow on trees. Peanuts grow underground and are part of a different plant family, the legumes. Other examples of legumes include beans, peas, lentils and soybeans. Being allergic to peanuts does not mean you have a greater chance of being allergic to another legume.

Soy products. Allergy to soy, a product of soybeans, is a common food allergy. Often, soy allergy starts in infancy with reaction to soy-based infant formula. Although most children outgrow soy allergy, some carry the allergy into adulthood.

Having a soy allergy means avoiding products that contain soy, which can be difficult. Many foods, such as meat products, bakery goods, chocolate and breakfast cereals, may contain soy.

Wheat. Wheat proteins are found in many foods, and some are more obvious than others. Although wheat allergy is often confused with celiac disease, there

is a difference. Celiac disease is a sensitivity to gluten (found in wheat, rye, and barley). But a wheat allergy can do more than make a person feel ill — like other food allergies, it also can cause a life-threatening reaction.

Other Common Allergens

Insect allergy. For most people, being stung by an insect means swelling, redness, and itching at the site of the bite. But for those with insect venom allergy, an insect sting can cause more serious symptoms or even death.

Medicines. Antibiotics are the most common type of medicines that cause allergic reactions. Many other others, including over-the-counter medicines (those you can buy without a prescription), also can cause allergic reactions.

Chemicals. Some cosmetics or laundry detergents can make people break out in hives. Usually, this is because someone has a reaction to the chemicals in these products, though it may not always be an allergic reaction. Dyes, household cleaners, and pesticides used on lawns or plants also can cause allergic reactions in some people.

Other Not So Common Things That Can Cause Hives

These allergens are very difficult to diagnose because they cannot be found with normal allergy skin and/or blood tests.

Heat and/or Sun Exposure. Heat hives are an allergic reaction to a rise in skin temperature, resulting in an itching, burning sensation. This reaction can sometimes result in hives over much of the body.

Bacterial or viral or fungal infections.

Most infections are not allergies but can cause allergy-like symptoms.

Bacteria are living things that have only one cell. Under a microscope, they look like balls, rods, or spirals. They are so small that a line of 1,000 could fit across a pencil eraser. Most bacteria won't hurt you - less than 1 percent of the different types make people sick. But infectious bacteria can make you ill. They reproduce quickly in your body. Many give off chemicals called toxins, which can damage tissue and make you sick or result in skin rashes or hives. Antibiotics are the usual treatment.

Viral infections are the most common cause of hives all over the body. Other symptoms such as a fever, cough or diarrhea are also present. The hives may last around 3 days. However, this is not an allergy.

Fungi are difficult to avoid because they are a natural part of the environment. Fungi live outdoors in soil, on plants, trees, and other vegetation. They are also on many indoor surfaces and on your skin. However, most serious fungal infections are rare, but they do happen. They are most common among people with weak immune systems.

Emotional Stress. When you're all stressed out, your body releases hormones and other chemicals, including histamine, the powerful chemical that leads to allergy symptoms. While stress doesn't cause allergies, it can make an allergic reaction worse by increasing the histamine in your bloodstream.



What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Allergies?



The type and severity of allergy symptoms vary from allergy to allergy and person to person. Allergies may show up as itchy eyes, sneezing, a stuffy nose, throat tightness, trouble breathing, vomiting, fainting, rashes, hives, low blood pressure, asthma attacks and even death.

How Are Allergies Diagnosed?

To evaluate whether you have an allergy, your doctor will likely:

- Ask detailed questions about signs and symptoms
- Perform a physical exam
- Have you keep a detailed diary of symptoms and possible triggers

If you have a food allergy, your doctor will likely:

- Ask you to keep a detailed diary of the foods you eat
- Ask if you've stopped eating the suspected food during the allergy evaluation

Your doctor might also recommend one or both of the following tests. However, be aware that these allergy tests can be falsely positive or falsely negative.

- **Skin test.** A doctor or nurse will prick your skin and expose you to small amounts of the proteins found in potential allergens. If you're allergic, you'll likely develop a raised bump (hive) at the test location on your skin.



Skin Prick Allergy Test

- **Blood test.** Specific IgE blood testing measures the amount of allergy-causing antibodies in your bloodstream, known as immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies. A blood sample is sent to a medical laboratory, where it can be tested for evidence of sensitivity to possible allergens.

If your doctor suspects your problems are caused by something other than an allergy, other tests might help identify — or rule out — other medical problems.

As I stated before, 80% of the time, the cause of your allergy is never found!

How Are Allergies Treated?

There's no cure for allergies, but symptoms can be managed. The best way to cope with them is to avoid the allergens. If avoiding environmental allergens isn't possible or doesn't help, doctors might prescribe medicines, including antihistamines, eye drops, and nasal sprays. (Many of these also are available without a prescription.)

In some cases, doctors recommend allergy shots (immunotherapy) to help desensitize a person to an allergen. But allergy shots are only helpful for allergens such as dust, mold, pollens, animals, and insect stings. They're not used for food allergies.

In conclusion...

If nothing else, you learned a lot about my skin problems. I'm still not sure if my hives are caused by an allergy or not. At my age, I probably never will be. My best guess is emotional stress along with heat (sweat) are the cause.

I'm currently reading a book titled "The Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions" written by Esther M. Sternberg, M.D.

Since ancient times, humans have felt intuitively that emotions and health are linked, and recently there has been much popular speculation about this notion. But until now, without compelling evidence, it has been impossible to say for sure that such a connection really exists and especially how it works.

Now, that evidence has been discovered. This book lays it all out in an interesting manner. It is now a fact that negative emotions and stress can cause health issues and diseases.



So, the secret to good health and a long life is - drink beer and be happy!!

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