

Things to know about

- 1 in 3 people already live with allergy in the UK
- 50% of the UK population will have an allergy by 2026
- Allergies are rising at a rate of 5% every year
- In 2022 allergy was the most reported chronic health condition in the UK

What is an allergy?

- An allergy is when your body has an adverse reaction to something that is usually harmless, like grass pollen or a food that you have eaten. This causes the body's immune system to try to protect itself by setting off an allergic reaction.
- For most people this might be a rash on the skin, for example hives or 'nettle rash', itchy eyes, or feeling or being sick and can be treated with an antihistamine.
- For some people this might cause a more severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis.

Useful resources

- [What is an allergy.](#)
- [Types of allergy.](#)

Anaphylaxis

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening, severe allergic reaction. It is a medical emergency, and requires immediate treatment.

How do you treat anaphylaxis?

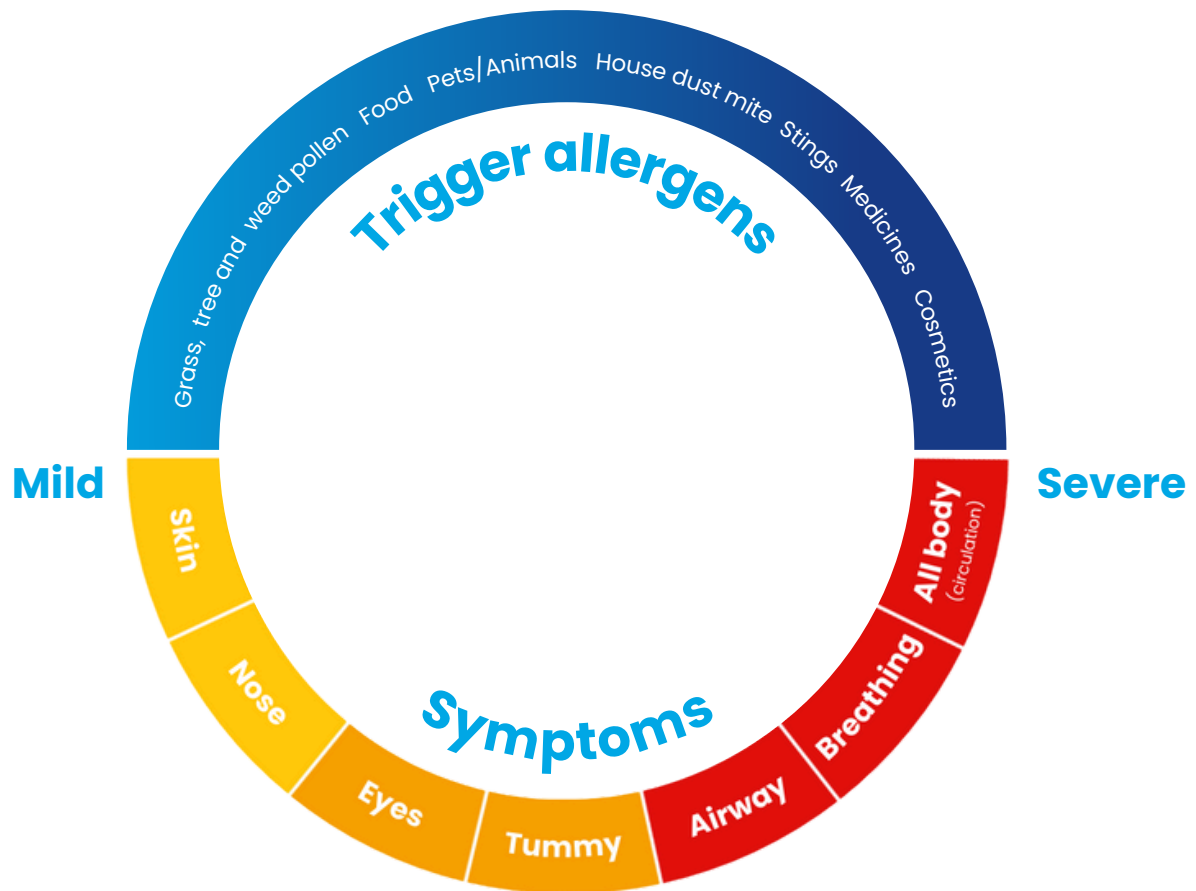
The first line treatment for severe symptoms is adrenaline (epinephrine) given by an injection into the upper outer muscle of the thigh.

Useful resources

- [Anaphylaxis Symptoms and Actions](#)
- [4 As leaflet](#)

What are the triggers and symptoms?

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Skin	Itching, hives (nettle rash) or rash, swelling of lips, eyes or face
Nose	Itchy, runny nose, sneezing a lot
Eyes	Itchy, red, watery eyes
Tummy	Feeling sick or being sick, tummy pain, diarrhoea
Airway	Wheezing, coughing a lot, tight feeling in chest, not being able to breath or talk properly
Breathing	Tongue or throat can swell, difficulty talking, change in voice (sounds like sore throat)
All body (circulation)	Feeling dizzy, feeling faint, feeling irritable with confusion, pale and floppy, collapsing/loss of consciousness/passing out

Food allergies

- It is estimated that 5% of adults and 8% of children are affected by food allergy.
- Any food can cause a food allergy.
- However, there are 9 foods which are responsible for 90% of allergic reactions. These are: milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, sesame, soya (soyabeans), wheat (gluten), shellfish (crustaceans and molluscs) and fish.
- There are 14 food allergens which must legally be listed on all food labels. These include the above allergens, plus celery, mustard, lupin, and sulphur dioxide (sulphites).

Useful resources

- [Labelling guide](#)
- [Eating out](#)
- [Parent Pathways](#)
- [Decoding food allergy labelling](#)

Hay fever

- Hay fever is also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis.
- It is an allergic reaction to pollen. People with hay fever can be allergic to the small, fine grass, tree or weed pollens carried by the wind and easily breathed in through the nose.
- Flower pollens are insect pollinated and are larger and stickier, so not carried by the wind and less likely to cause hay fever symptoms.
- Hay fever can cause an itchy and runny nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, and cough. Some people may also find their asthma or eczema gets worse.
- 1 in 4 people (or approximately 16 million people) in the UK have hay fever. These people are also 4 times more likely to be affected by other conditions driven by allergy such as atopic eczema, asthma and food allergies.

Useful resources

- [Allergic Rhinitis and Hay Fever factsheet](#)
- [University of Worcester's weekly pollen forecast and summary](#)

Respiratory allergies and the link with asthma

- Respiratory allergies affect the respiratory system, including the nose, throat and lungs. Common respiratory conditions are allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and allergic asthma.
- Common allergens which can trigger an allergic reaction include pets, pollen, house dust mites, mould and sometimes foods.

How are respiratory allergies and asthma linked?

- Exposure to an airborne allergen can trigger an asthma attack or allergens such as pollens and house dust mites can trigger or worsen asthma symptoms.
- When this happens to a person, it is referred to as allergic asthma.
- There are 5.4 million people with asthma in the UK, and 80% of this figure (4.3 million people) also have hay fever (Asthma & Lung UK, May 2024). Having hay fever and asthma is a risk factor for having a more severe asthma attack.
- Hay fever in children matters because if it is not properly controlled it can develop into full blown asthma.

Useful resources

- [Asthma and respiratory webpage](#)
- [Asthma poster](#)
- [Allergic Rhinitis, Hay Fever and Asthma leaflet](#)

Allergies and the link with eczema

- Allergies can also affect skin conditions such as eczema.
- Eczema is chronic skin condition, which causes dry, itchy and sometimes red and inflamed skin.
- The symptoms of eczema can be triggered by both non-allergic triggers, such as temperature, but also by exposure to something that someone is allergic to, such as pet dander, pollen and foods.
- When someone with an allergy eats or comes into contact with an allergen, they commonly develop skin symptoms during an allergic reaction, such as hives, redness or swelling.
- This is not the same as when an allergy results in the symptoms of eczema (e.g. dry itchy skin). Eczema is different.
- That is because exposure to allergens can trigger the symptoms of eczema to appear or worsen, but an allergy is not the primary cause of the condition.
- It is common for people with eczema to also have other allergic conditions, for example asthma, hay fever or a food allergy.

- It is also possible for people to have symptoms of eczema that are not caused by an allergy.
- The most common form of allergic eczema – atopic dermatitis – affects 1 in 5 children and 1 in 10 adults in the UK.
- The symptoms of allergic eczema include skin becoming itchy, red or inflamed, dry and cracked and swollen or inflamed. In severe cases, eczema can lead to blisters that may ooze or weep.
- Treatments include a finding a carefully developed individual skin moisturising and bathing routine, steroid creams and antihistamines. Skincare routines to manage eczema can be very time-intensive and costly.
- Eczema’s unpredictability and its impact on mental health may lead to avoiding social events.

Useful resources

- [Eczema Infographic for Young People](#)
- [Eczema in Children factsheet](#)

Allergies and mental wellbeing

- Living with allergies can take a toll on both the mental wellbeing of children and the parents who care for them.
- The constant worry of a reaction or flare-up can leave them anxious, and exclusion from social activities can leave children feeling isolated and vulnerable to bullying. Anxiety and stress can also cause allergy symptoms to worsen.
- Providing a safe space for children with allergy to express their concerns and ensuring inclusivity in activities is crucial. Simple acts can make all the difference, such as:
 - Thinking ahead and accommodating someone’s allergy (e.g. providing an inside space at an outdoor event for someone with hay fever or keeping aside food packaging for someone with food allergy to check).
 - Be flexible and understanding: allergy is unpredictable and a sudden flare, reaction or rush of anxiety might lead to someone cancelling or changing plans at the last minute.
 - Asking and listening: this demonstrates that you care and want to understand their allergies better.

For further information visit the Allergy UK website: <https://www.allergyuk.org/>

Allergic terms explained

Adrenaline:

This is a hormone that naturally occurs within everyone's body. It is used as a medication when someone has a serious allergic reaction. Adrenaline makes your heartbeat faster and your lungs breathe more efficiently, increasing the blood flow to your brain.

Adrenaline auto-injector (AAI):

This is the generic term for the emergency medication device which injects the adrenaline into the body. These are sometimes also known by their brand name of EpiPen or Jext, or called an adrenaline pen or device.

Allergic Rhinitis:

Perennial allergic rhinitis or seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever), is caused by inflammation in the lining of the nose that is triggered by an allergen being breathed in. Symptoms include an itchy/runny nose, sneezing, itchy/red/watery eyes, coughing and some people may find their asthma or eczema gets worse.

Allergy:

An allergy happens when your body thinks something, like a food or pollen, is harmful and trying to make you sick. Your body's defence system goes into overdrive and tries to protect you by triggering a reaction.

Anaphylaxis:

(pronounced ana-fil-ax-is) This is the name given to a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction.

Antihistamines:

These are medicines often used to relieve mild/moderate symptoms of allergies such as hay fever, hives and mild reactions to insect bites.

Asthma inhaler:

These are hand-held devices which deliver asthma medication to the lungs. Visit <https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/inhaler-videos> for more information.

Cross-contamination:

Cross-contamination happens when germs or allergens move accidentally from one thing to another. This can occur through contact, air, or shared utensils.

Pet dander:

Pet dander refers to tiny flecks of skin shed by pets, such as cats and dogs.

Precautionary Allergen Labelling (PAL):

This is the term used for statements, such as 'May contain...', which indicate when a food product may have a trace of an allergen due to cross-contamination during the manufacturing process.

These statements are often included on labels. They can make it difficult for the food allergic consumer to make safe food choices. There are many ways 'may contain' can be expressed (e.g. "not suitable for milk allergy sufferers", "may contain traces of milk", "made in a factory with milk"). There is no hierarchy of risk in these statements, they all mean the same.

Rescue medication:

The generic term for allergy medication, including adrenaline auto-injectors (AIs) and asthma inhalers.

'Safe food' and 'unsafe food':

These are child-friendly terms we use for foods to which someone is or isn't allergic.

Top 14 allergens:

These have been identified by the European Union (EU) as the most common sources of food-related severe allergic reactions. Although the UK has left the EU, we still use this guidance in the UK. It is a legal requirement for these allergens to be clearly highlighted on any labels of food products that contain these ingredients. People can be allergic to other foods, but only the top 14 allergens are legally required to be disclosed on labels.

Trigger:

This is the term used for something which causes an allergic reaction. For example, grass pollen could be the trigger for hay fever.

Trainer adrenaline auto-injectors

Visit the manufacturers website to order training pens:

- Jext Kids: <https://kids.jext.co.uk/order-jext-trainer-pen/>
- Jext Adults: <https://adults.jext.co.uk/order-trainer-pen/>
- EpiPen: <https://cloud.email.viatrisconnect.com/EpiPen-Trainer-Pen-Registration>

How to use an adrenaline auto-injector

Visit the manufacturers pages for guidance on how to use their adrenaline auto-injectors:

- <https://www.epipen.co.uk/en-gb/patients/your-epipen/how-to-use-your-epipen>
- <https://kids.jext.co.uk/about-jext/how-to-use/>
- <https://adults.jext.co.uk/about-jext/how-to-use/>