

Avoiding Latex



If you have a latex allergy, it means you're sensitive to natural rubber latex. When you're exposed to latex, your body's immune system views it as a harmful substance and attacks it. In severe cases, this can cause symptoms that can threaten your life if not treated. This is a lifetime condition. The best way to prevent symptoms is to avoid latex. Below are some tips on how to do this.

Common products that contain latex

Latex can be found in many products. Protect yourself by not using these products, if possible. Some common products that contain latex include:

- Gloves
- Balloons
- Condoms and diaphragms
- Bandages
- Elastic on clothing
- Rubber bands
- Bathmats and rugs with rubber backings
- Pacifiers
- Baby bottle nipples
- Rubber toys
- Certain medical equipment, such as IV tubing, syringes, urinary catheters, resuscitation equipment, blood pressure cuffs, and stethoscopes

Note: Some latex products, such as gloves, may be lined with powder. This powder can send latex particles into the air. If these particles are breathed in, this can cause symptoms.

Safe substitutes for latex

Many products that contain latex have safe substitutes. The following products can be used in place of latex ones:

- Powder-free, synthetic (nonlatex/latex-free), or vinyl gloves
- Mylar, vinyl, or plastic balloons
- Polyurethane or sheepskin condoms (note that sheepskin condoms do not prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV)
- Silicone diaphragms
- Latex-free bandages
- Latex-free rubber bands
- Bathmats and rugs with vinyl or foam backings

- Silicone, vinyl, or plastic feeding nipples and pacifiers
- Plastic or cloth toys

Other tips

- Wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace. Make certain all of your healthcare providers know about your allergy and have it identified in your medical records.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk for an anaphylactic reaction and the need to carry an EpiPen. An anaphylactic reaction is a severe, life-threatening emergency that can happen after you've been exposed to something you're allergic to. It can happen within seconds or minutes after exposure. Some of the symptoms include itchy skin, swelling of the mouth, throat, or tongue, breathing and swallowing difficulties, and unconsciousness. This is a medical emergency. An EpiPen contains epinephrine, a medicine that can relax the muscles in your airways and make it easier for you to breathe.
- If you are exposed to latex in your work environment, tell your employer about your allergy.
- Not everyone reacts in the same way to the same latex products. Gloves, balloons, and condoms cause symptoms most often. Even if your symptoms are mild, you should still avoid exposure to any latex products. This is because your allergy can worsen with increased exposure to latex.
- Be on the lookout for hidden latex. For instance, when you eat out, ask whether they use latex gloves to handle or prepare food. Also, when you go to your dentist or healthcare provider's office, hair salon, or florist, ask whether they use latex gloves.
- Read labels before using any products to make sure they are latex-free.
- Certain foods contain proteins that are like the proteins found in latex. These foods include bananas, apples, potatoes, tomatoes, chestnuts, papaya, kiwis, and avocados. If you have a latex allergy, it's common to also have an allergy to these foods. Ask your healthcare provider whether you should remove any of these foods from your diet.

Resources for more information

To learn more about latex allergy, try the resources below:

- **American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology**, 847-427-1200, acaai.org/
- **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology**, www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments.aspx

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