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Allergies

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Diagnosis

Diagnosis involves the steps that your healthcare professional takes to find out whether you have an allergy. Your healthcare professional will likely:

- Ask detailed questions about your symptoms.
- Do a physical exam.
- Have you keep a detailed diary of symptoms and possible triggers.

If you have a food allergy, your healthcare professional 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 exam.

Your healthcare professional also may recommend one or both of the following tests. Be aware that these allergy tests can give results that might not be accurate.

- **Skin test.** A healthcare professional uses a tiny needle to prick or scratch your skin and expose you to small amounts of the proteins found in your potential allergens. If you're allergic, you'll likely develop a raised bump called a hive at the test area on your skin. If the test result suggests you don't have an allergy but your healthcare professional still thinks you might, you may need an exam called an intradermal skin test. Your healthcare professional injects a small amount of allergen into the outer layer of the skin.
- **Blood test.** This test measures the amount of antibodies that the blood makes to destroy allergens. These antibodies are called immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies. The test is known as specific IgE (sIgE) blood testing. It's also commonly called radioallergosorbent test (RAST) or ImmunoCAP testing. Your blood sample is sent to a lab to find out if you're sensitive to suspected allergens.

If your healthcare professional thinks that something other than an allergy is the cause of your symptoms, other tests might be needed to help find the cause.

More Information

[Allergy skin tests](#)

Treatment

Allergy treatments include:

- **Staying away from allergy triggers, also known as avoidance.** Your healthcare professional helps you take steps to spot and stay away from your allergy triggers. Often, this is the most important step in preventing allergic reactions and curbing symptoms.
- **Medicines.** Depending on your allergy, medicines can help turn down your immune system's reaction and ease symptoms. Your healthcare professional

might suggest medicine in the form of pills or liquid, nasal sprays, or eye drops.

- **Immunotherapy.** This treatment can help treat severe allergies. It also can help for allergies that don't get better with other treatments.

Immunotherapy involves getting a series of shots of purified allergen extracts. These extracts train the immune system not to overreact to your suspected allergen. Most often, the shots are given over a period of a few years.

Another form of immunotherapy is a tablet that's placed under the tongue until it dissolves. This is known as sublingual immunotherapy. Sublingual medicines placed under the tongue are used to treat some pollen allergies.

- **Emergency epinephrine.** If you have a severe allergy, you might need to carry an emergency epinephrine shot at all times. An epinephrine shot (Auvi-Q, EpiPen, others) can ease symptoms of a severe allergic reaction until you get emergency treatment.

More Information

[Allergy medications: Know your options](#)

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Clinical trials

[Explore Mayo Clinic studies](#) testing new treatments, interventions and tests as a means to prevent, detect, treat or manage this condition.

Lifestyle and home remedies

Some allergy symptoms get better with steps that you can take at home:

- **Sinus congestion and hay fever symptoms.** These often get better with saline nasal sprays. These sprays rinse out the sinuses with a salt and water solution. You can use a neti pot or a specially designed squeeze bottle to flush out thickened mucus and irritants from your nose. But be aware that using a neti pot or other device wrong can lead to infection.
 - **Household airborne allergy symptoms.** Lessen your exposure to dust mites or pet dander by washing bedding and stuffed toys in hot water often. Also, keep the indoor humidity level low. And regularly using a vacuum with a fine filter such as a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Think about replace carpeting with hard flooring too.
 - **Mold allergy symptoms.** Reduce moisture in damp areas, such as your bath and kitchen, by using ventilation fans and dehumidifiers. Fix leaks inside and outside your home. You also can improve airflow by leaving doors between rooms open and moving furniture away from walls.
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Alternative medicine

Research suggests that a type of alternative medicine called acupuncture may help ease some hay fever symptoms. With acupuncture, a practitioner places very thin needles through the skin at specific points on the body.

Preparing for your appointment

For symptoms that could be caused by an allergy, see your main healthcare professional. You might be referred to a doctor called an allergist who treats allergies.

What you can do

Ask if you should stop taking allergy medicines before your appointment, and for how long. For example, antihistamines can affect the results of an allergy skin test.

Make a list of:

- **Your symptoms**, including any that don't seem related to allergies. Note when the symptoms began.
- **Your family's history** of allergies and asthma, including specific types of allergies, if you know them.
- **All medicines**, vitamins and other supplements you take, including doses.
- **Questions to ask** your healthcare professional.

Some basic questions to ask your healthcare professional include:

- What is the most likely cause of my symptoms?
- Are there other possible causes?
- Will I need allergy tests?
- Should I see an allergy specialist?
- What treatment do you recommend?
- I have these other health conditions. How can I best manage them together?
- What emergency symptoms should my friends and family be aware of?

Feel free to ask other questions.

What to expect from your doctor

Your healthcare professional is likely to ask you questions such as:

- Have you recently had a cold or other respiratory infection?

- Are your symptoms worse at certain times of the day?
- Does anything seem to improve or worsen your symptoms?
- Are your symptoms worse in certain areas of your home or at work?
- Do you have pets, and do they go into bedrooms?
- Is there dampness or water damage in your home or workplace?
- Do you smoke, or are you exposed to secondhand smoke or other pollutants?
- What treatments have you tried so far? Have they helped?

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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