

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These are questions that have come up during the screening of this video.

What is the difference between food allergy and lactose intolerance?

People who have food allergy experience an abnormal reaction when they eat or drink the food they are allergic to. The reaction occurs because the body's immune system mistakes the food as an invader and tries to eliminate it from the body. Some symptoms of this type of reaction include hives, rashes, swelling, difficulty breathing, and vomiting. The symptoms can be severe and sometimes dangerous.

Lactose intolerance happens when the body is unable to digest lactose, one of the main components of milk and dairy products. As the undigested lactose moves through the intestines, it may cause stomach pain or cramping, bloating, gas, and diarrhea. Lactose intolerance can be uncomfortable, but it is not dangerous.

How are environmental allergies different?

People who have environmental allergies experience abnormal reactions to things in the environment, such as dust, trees, grass, and animals. Like food allergies, these reactions occur because the body's immune system mistakes harmless things in the environment for dangerous invaders and tries to fight against them. Some symptoms of this type of reaction include itching eyes, watery eyes, sneezing, runny nose, stuffy nose, and cough. Some people with environmental allergies may need to take medicines to help with the symptoms because the symptoms can make them uncomfortable. Unlike food allergies, though, environmental allergies are not dangerous.

How are medication allergies different? What are their symptoms?

Medication allergies are just like food allergies, but they happen when people who are allergic to certain medications take those medications. The most common medications that people are allergic to are antibiotics, like penicillin and amoxicillin. Like food allergies, medication allergies can be severe.

How close to the food can you get without having a reaction?

People with food allergies have reactions when they eat or drink the food they are allergic to. If the allergen gets in contact with their skin, they could have a local reaction like hives or a rash. They do not get a reaction just from being around the food. People can ingest tiny amounts of food without realizing it— for example, if they touch the hand of a friend who was recently eating the food and then touch their mouth. This is called *cross-contact*. Even these tiny amounts can cause a reaction if someone has a food allergy. It's important for everyone to wash their hands AND wash any things that may have come into contact with food both before and after eating.

How long does it take for a reaction to occur?

Allergic reactions to food generally happen very quickly after a person with a food allergy eats or drinks the food – the symptoms can develop within minutes. Most reactions happen within two hours of eating or drinking the food.

How long does it take the medicine to work?

The medicine used for allergic reactions to food is called *injectable epinephrine*. It generally starts to work within a few minutes. If someone has a severe allergic reaction to a food, they may need more than one dose of epinephrine to get better.

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How do you get allergies?

No one really knows why some people get food allergies and other people do not. We do know that food allergies run in families, and food allergies are related to genetics. Most people with food allergies develop allergies when they are babies or kids, but some people get food allergies for the first time when they are adults.

How do you grow out of food allergies?

For some people with food allergies, the immune system eventually recognizes that foods are not dangerous invaders and stops attacking them. People who outgrow their food allergies are then able to eat the foods without having a reaction. Allergies to certain foods are more likely to go away than others. For example, many babies and kids who are allergic to milk and eggs outgrow their allergies while they are still kids. On the other hand, some people who with allergies never outgrow them.

What kind of treatments are there?

There is no cure for food allergies, and no medications can prevent reactions. The medication used for allergic reactions stops a reaction once it's started, but the most important way to help a person with a food allergy is to help them avoid a reaction in the first place. Many treatments are currently being tested by researchers.

What do you do if there are no medicines or resources near you?

Get an adult and call 911 immediately. Stay with the person who is having a reaction, have them lie down and do your best to support them.