

Let's Talk about: Allergies



ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL
COMMUNITY FORUMS

What are Allergies?

An allergy is a disorder of the immune system. It is an abnormal reaction by a person's immune system against a normally harmless substance (known as allergens); these reactions are acquired and caused by the allergic antibody IgE.

Common causes of allergy symptoms include: food allergies (peanut or milk allergy), environmental allergies (grass pollen, weed pollen, tree pollen, moulds, house dust mite and animal dander), drugs (penicillin), and insect venom.

Allergic reactions can be mild or serious. They can be confined to a small area of the body or may affect the entire body. Common allergic reactions include eczema, hives, hay fever, itching, and difficulty breathing.

Allergies can also play a major role in conditions such as asthma. In some people, severe allergies to environmental or dietary allergens or to medication may result in life-threatening anaphylactic reactions and potentially death.

Allergies by the Numbers:

- Approximately one out of every three Canadians is affected by allergies.
- Up to 6% of children are affected by food allergies.
- Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) affects 20 - 25% of Canadians. It can lead to sinusitis (sinus infection) and recurrent ear infections.
- Eczema (atopic dermatitis) affects 10% of children and the numbers are increasing.
- Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can kill! It affects 1 - 2 % of the population

Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that happens to some people who have allergies to food, insect stings, drugs or latex.

Anaphylaxis happens very quickly and affects your entire body. Signs usually start within 1 to 30 minutes of coming into contact with the thing to which you are allergic. However it may take more than an hour for you to notice anaphylactic symptoms. Warning signs may include:

- A red rash, with welts, that is usually itchy
- Swollen throat or swollen areas of the body
- Wheezing
- Passing out
- Chest tightness
- Trouble breathing
- A hoarse voice
- Trouble swallowing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramping
- A pale or red color to the face and body

Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical treatment. If you think you are having this type of reaction, use your autoinjectable epinephrine and call 911 immediately.

Asthma

85% of asthmatics have allergies which can be major triggers of asthma attacks.

Source
The Canadian Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Foundation

American Academic of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Join medical experts from Providence Health Care for monthly community forums at St. Paul's Hospital. Each month features a different health topic with time to pose questions to the experts.

The forums are free and take place the third Wednesday of every month.

7:00 – 9:00 pm
(doors open at 6:30)
New Lecture Theatre
St. Paul's Hospital
1081 Burrard Street

For more information and to register, please email ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca or call 604-806-8495.

www.phcmedicine.ca

This evening's presentations will be available to view on our website, thanks in part to the generous support of:

BC Hydro 
FOR GENERATIONS

Allergy Treatment at St. Paul's Hospital

A unique provincial resource, Providence Health Care provides complete care for British Columbians with allergies.

Just as important as the high-quality care we provide is our teaching and research mandate that helps us better understand this condition, improve patient care and develop new treatment solutions.

Treatment

Allergen avoidance when possible is the basis of management.

Oral antihistamines as well as antihistamine eye drops are of benefit for hay fever symptoms as well as itching.

Topical corticosteroids (nasal sprays and inhalers) are the most effective and safe medications for hay fever and asthma.

Immunotherapy

"Allergy shots" reduce allergic symptoms by modifying the immunologic response to allergens. They can be highly effective but require frequent clinic visits to receive the injections and do have a risk of a severe reaction.

New Considerations regarding Food Allergy

Oral Allergy Syndrome

- Itching and swelling of the mouth and throat discomfort immediately after eating various raw fruits and vegetables occurs in many individuals with seasonal pollen allergies.

- These reactions are caused by heat-sensitive proteins that the fruit has to protect itself. These cross-react with pollens. Cooking destroys these allergens.
- Common foods are members of the apple and plum families, cherries, kiwi, melons and tree nuts that have not been well-roasted.
- These foods only very rarely cause more severe reactions, unlike the heat-stable food allergens that cause anaphylaxis.

Eosinophilic Esophagitis

- Difficulty swallowing and having food stuck in the esophagus can be due to allergic causes.
- The esophageal wall in these cases is thickened with formation of rings. It contains high numbers of the allergic cell, the eosinophil.
- Defining causative foods to be avoided is important in management as drug treatment for this is difficult.

St. Paul's Hospital is an acute care, teaching and research hospital located in downtown Vancouver. It is home to many world-class medical and surgical programs, including heart and lung services, HIV/AIDS and kidney care.

St. Paul's serves both the local community and patients from across BC and the Yukon. St. Paul's is one of 14 health care facilities in Vancouver operated by Providence Health Care, one of Canada's largest faith-based health care organizations. Providence's 1,000 physicians and 6,000 staff deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia while training medical professionals and making innovative advances in research.

To support programs like this at St. Paul's, please visit www.helpstpauls.com to make a donation to the Department of Medicine Academic Fund.