

Emergency Department Allergic Reaction

General Information

Allergic reactions occur when you come in contact with substances that are sensitive to your body. Allergic reactions can be caused by food, drugs, infections, insect bites, animals, things you breathe (such as pollen and dust) and skin contact with irritants such as cosmetics and soaps. Symptoms of an allergic reaction may vary from mild (examples: vomiting, rash, watery eyes, runny nose) to severe or life-threatening such as difficulty breathing, rapid or pounding heart rate, swelling of throat or tongue and chest tightness. Onset of allergic reactions can vary. Most occur within minutes after exposure to allergens but some can occur after several hours, particularly if allergens cause reactions after digestion. You may have been exposed to a substance in the past without having a reaction. Once you have a reaction, you will usually react when exposed again.

Instructions

1. Avoid contact with substances that cause reactions.
2. If you have had a severe allergic reaction, have someone stay with you for 24 hours in case the symptoms return.
3. For rashes or hives from an allergic reaction, take a cool shower or bath (avoid hot water), and apply cool compresses to the skin to relieve itching and discomfort.
4. Rest and cut down on physical activities until the symptoms have gone.
5. If unsure of what caused the reaction, keep a list of activities, foods eaten, or exposures to environmental elements. Also note any symptoms or new outbreaks that occur.
6. Check with your doctor before taking any medications, including ones that you buy at the drug store.
7. If you are given medications called anti-histamines (e.g. Benadryl), you should not drive or do things that require your full attention. Anti-histamines may cause you to feel sleepy.
8. If you have had a severe allergic reaction, you should carry an allergy kit with you at all times. The doctor may provide a prescription and emergency care plan for an anaphylaxis kit. You should review this with your family doctor as well.

See your Family Doctor if:

- Hives, rash or itching continue after 2 days of anti-histamine use.

Return to Emergency if any if the following develop:

- Difficulty breathing, wheezing, a tight feeling in your chest or throat, hoarse voice, feeling faint or a swollen mouth or tongue. This is an emergency, call an ambulance.

For more information or questions contact HealthLinkBC at 811.

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