

Did you know you could be **Allergic to Medicines?**

Medicine **Allergy** Matters

Is an **allergy** to a medicine the same as a side effect?

No. All medicines can cause side effects. You and your doctor will decide whether these side effects are bad enough to stop the medication or whether you can tolerate them.

Having an **allergy** to a medicine can cause many **symptoms** including swelling and a rash. In more severe cases it can cause anaphylactic shock which occurs because your body's immune system over-reacts in response to a foreign substance (the medicine). Entry of the medicine into the blood stream of an allergic person provokes the release of chemicals. These can cause blood vessels to widen, leading to a sudden severe lowering of blood pressure and constriction of the airways in the lungs. In severe cases this can lead to death.

Why is it **important** to know the difference?

If you are identified as having an allergy when in fact you had a side effect you may not be given the ideal medicine for your condition if you are ill. If you really do have an allergy to a medicine you can make sure you never get given it again.

What are the medicines that cause allergies/anaphylaxis?

You can have an allergy to a medicine or its ingredients. The common medicines to cause allergic reactions are:

- Penicillin
- Sulfa antibiotics
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDS, such as aspirin and ibuprofen)
- Opioids
- Allopurinol
- Seizure and anti-arrhythmia medications

You may however have been told you are allergic to a different medicine.

What are the symptoms of an allergy?

There are many different symptoms, but the most common are:

- Swelling of face, lips, tongue or throat
- Itchy skin
- Nettle rash, hives or any other rash
- Wheezing and difficulty breathing and talking
- Changes in heart rate
- Faintness, collapse or unconsciousness

What should I do if I really am allergic to a medicine?

You should make every effort to never take the medicine that you are allergic to. You should tell any health care advisor (doctor, nurse, pharmacist); when you are admitted to hospital; or being prescribed a new medicine. You should also tell your family. You will then be given a different medicine if you are sick.

If you have been told you are allergic to penicillin you should know that there are other antibiotics that have penicillin in them. For example:

- Amoxicillin
- Benzylpenicillin
- Augmentin®
- Flucloxacillin
- Co-amoxiclav
- Tazocin®
- Ampicillin
- Penicillin V
- Heliclear®

What should I do if I think I had a side effect to a medicine and am not actually allergic?

You should discuss this with your GP. They may want to do further tests to confirm you are not allergic. If you are not then you should make sure your records are updated and your family know that you are not allergic to the medicine.