



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# The Management of Anaphylactic Reactions in Adults

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

## **Medicines Information**

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Caring with pride



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## **What is an anaphylactic reaction?**

An anaphylactic reaction is also known as anaphylactic shock or anaphylaxis. It is a severe allergic reaction that can develop quickly after exposure to a trigger known as an allergen.

## **What are the signs and symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction?**

You may have some or all of the following:

- Skin changes such as itchy skin or a raised red skin rash.
- Swelling of your eyes, lips, hands and feet.
- Swelling of your mouth, tongue or throat leading to breathing or swallowing difficulties.
- Wheezing.
- Tummy pain, nausea and vomiting.
- Feeling faint or light headed.
- Collapse and unconsciousness.

## **What are the causes of anaphylactic reactions?**

An anaphylactic reaction happens when your body's immune system overreacts to what is usually a harmless substance. When this happens, the substance is called an allergen. An allergen could be any substance.

Common triggers for an anaphylactic reaction include:

- food substances (e.g. nuts, seafood),
- certain medicines
- insect bites and stings.

## How can I avoid suspected allergens?

General advice for avoiding common allergens:

- Remove any source of the allergen from your home (e.g. food substances or cosmetic products).
- Always read the label on food and other products and be aware that ingredients may change.
- Be aware of the common alternative names for allergens which may be contained in food products and medication (e.g. peanuts may be listed as arachis oil).
- Check the ingredients on the menu when eating out or ordering take-away food.
- Stay indoors as much as possible during the high pollen season and avoid open spaces or areas with lots of pollen or insects.
- Avoid wearing bright clothes and perfumes to prevent attracting insects.
- Use alternative safety wear such as latex-free gloves.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet or carry an alert note if you have a medicine related trigger.

An allergy specialist will be able to give you specific advice about how to avoid your particular allergen.

## **What can I expect if I have been referred to a specialist allergy service?**

If you have an appointment with a specialist allergy service you can expect to be seen by a team of specialists. This may include consultants, specialist allergy nurses and allergy dieticians.

The first step to finding out the cause of your reactions will be to ask you about the allergic reaction you had. This helps us to identify the cause of your anaphylactic reaction. Sometimes this is not possible because the cause maybe unclear.

You may need to be examined or have allergy tests such as a skin patch test or blood tests. You will have the opportunity to discuss your allergy and any concerns you may have with a specialist. We can put together a plan to help you come up with ways of preventing and avoiding anaphylactic reactions.

The overall aim of this referral is to help you manage your condition and reduce future anaphylaxis and admissions to hospital.

## What is an adrenaline auto-injector?

If your doctor thinks you are at a high risk of another anaphylactic reaction in the future, we may give you an adrenaline auto-injector when you leave hospital.

Adrenaline is a substance that can reverse the symptoms of anaphylaxis. It usually comes in a pre-filled, single use device known as an auto-injector. This delivers adrenaline quickly into the thigh muscle (see the '**How do I use an adrenaline autoinjector?**' section for more information).

Adrenaline auto-injectors are available as branded devices such as EpiPen<sup>®</sup>, Emerade<sup>®</sup> or Jext<sup>®</sup>.

**Disposal:** After use, please return the device to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

Do not throw out in household rubbish.

**Warning:** Accidental injection of this device into your hands or fingers can lead to problems with blood flow to this area. If this happens you need to go to your nearest hospital A&E department for immediate treatment.

## What should I do if I have an anaphylactic reaction?

An anaphylactic reaction should be treated as a medical emergency as it could be life-threatening.

If you have any signs or symptoms of anaphylaxis:

- You must use your adrenaline auto-injector immediately if you have one, through clothing if necessary.
- Call 999 for an ambulance and state 'anaphylaxis'.
- You should then lie down with your legs raised or, if you are having trouble breathing you should sit up.
- If possible someone should stay with you until an ambulance arrives.
- If you are having a reaction to food, remove any remaining food from the mouth.
- If you have been stung by an insect remove the sting if you can with your fingernails. Do not squeeze or push deeper into the skin. Cool the area with an ice pack.
- If you have used your adrenaline auto-injector you must inform the healthcare professional.
- Sometimes symptoms can return after you have started to feel better without any further exposure to the allergen. If this happens, you should treat it as a medical emergency as above.

## How do I use an adrenaline auto-injector?

You should fully familiarise yourself with your adrenaline auto-injector before you need to use it. Read the patient information leaflet provided with your device.

The following instructions apply to the use of an EpiPen<sup>®</sup>. Other devices may vary.

1. Hold the EpiPen<sup>®</sup> by the middle and remove the blue safety cap only when you are ready to use it.
2. Hold the EpiPen<sup>®</sup> at a distance of about 10cm or four inches away from the outer thigh with the orange tip pointing towards your thigh.
3. Jab firmly into the outer thigh at a right angle (listen for a 'click') and hold for three seconds. This action will activate the device and inject the adrenaline into your thigh.
4. Remove the EpiPen<sup>®</sup> from the thigh and discard of safely. (The orange safety guard should cover the needle). Some liquid will remain in the device after use. Please do not reuse.
5. Ensure that an ambulance has been called, even if you start to feel better. The effects of the adrenaline will only last 10 to 15 minutes.

You can view a video of these instructions on the internet at <http://www.epipen.co.uk/patients/> (Accessed March 2019)

## **When should I use an adrenaline auto-injector?**

You should carry at least two adrenaline auto-injectors with you at all times.

If you experience any of the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis such as breathing difficulties, swelling of the throat or face or skin changes you should use your adrenaline injector straight away and call 999 for an ambulance even if your symptoms appear to be improving.

If your symptoms continue without improvement, you can use another adrenaline auto-injector after five to 15 minutes.

## **Patient support groups**

Support, help and information for people affected by anaphylaxis is available from a number of UK organisations. Contact details which you may find useful are listed below.

### **Allergy UK**

Telephone: Allergy Helpline 01322 619898

Website: <http://www.allergyuk.org/> (Accessed March 2019)

Email: [info@allergyuk.org](mailto:info@allergyuk.org)

### **Anaphylaxis Campaign**

Telephone: 01252 542029

Website: <http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/> (Accessed March 2019)

Email: [info@anaphylaxis.org.uk](mailto:info@anaphylaxis.org.uk)

### **Resuscitation Council (UK)**

Telephone: 020 7388 4678

Website: <https://www.resus.org.uk/#> (Accessed March 2019)

### **Medicines Information (based at York)**

Tel: 01904 725960

### **Medic Alert**

Website: <https://www.medicalert.org.uk/> (Accessed March 2019)

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

The Pharmacy Department, The York Hospital,  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone  
01904 725736

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.



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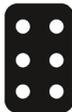
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