

1. **What Are Allergies?** Allergies occur when the immune system mistakenly identifies a harmless substance (allergen) as a harmful one, triggering a response. Common allergens include pollen, dust mites, mold, pet dander, certain foods, and insect stings.
2. **Types of Allergies:**
  - **Environmental Allergies:** Caused by substances like pollen, dust, and mold.
  - **Food Allergies:** Triggered by foods such as peanuts, eggs, or shellfish.
  - **Insect Sting Allergies:** Caused by stings from bees, wasps, or other insects.
  - **Drug Allergies:** Caused by reactions to medications.
3. **Symptoms of Allergies:** Symptoms vary depending on the type of allergy and can include:
  - Sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes (for environmental allergens)
  - Hives, swelling, or stomach issues (for food allergies)
  - Breathing problems, wheezing, or anaphylaxis (severe allergic reactions)
4. **Managing Allergies:**
  - **Avoiding Allergens:** The most effective way to manage allergies is to avoid exposure to triggers.
  - **Medications:** Over-the-counter antihistamines, nasal sprays, and decongestants can relieve mild symptoms. For more severe reactions, prescribed medications or epinephrine may be needed.
  - **Allergy Shots (Immunotherapy):** For individuals with severe or persistent allergies, immunotherapy may help reduce sensitivity to allergens over time.
5. **Anaphylaxis and Emergency Action:** Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that requires immediate attention. It can cause difficulty breathing, swelling, and loss of consciousness. Those at risk should carry an epinephrine auto-injector and seek emergency medical help.
6. **When to Seek Medical Help:**
  - If symptoms worsen or do not improve with over-the-counter treatments.
  - If anaphylaxis occurs, always use epinephrine and call 911 immediately.