



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Becoming More Independent in Managing Your Allergies

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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Becoming more independent in managing your allergies

As you become older and more independent it is important to start taking more responsibility for managing your allergies. This leaflet will give you some tips for managing your allergies in different situations. If you want any more information on the topics outlined in this leaflet, please go to the websites mentioned in the useful resources section.

Understanding your allergy management plan

It is important that you know what you are allergic to and where you may be exposed to these allergens so that you can avoid them. You should have a paper copy of your allergy management plan which confirms your allergies and how to manage an allergic reaction. It is often helpful to keep this with your allergy medications.

Make sure you are aware of the different types of medication you have been prescribed to manage your allergies or any allergic reactions. You should know when and how to use each of your medications. Check the expiry dates regularly and know how to order repeat prescriptions from your GP.

Managing an allergic reaction

It is important that you always carry antihistamines and your adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) with you in case of an allergic reaction. This also include your reliever inhaler if you have asthma. You should carry your medication every time you leave home, including short walks, playing sports, and eating out.

If you start having symptoms of an allergic reaction, follow your allergy management plan.

For mild or moderate reactions take your antihistamines. If you think you are having an anaphylactic reaction, even if you are not sure but think it might be, use your AAI straight away and call 999. Demonstration videos for each of the available AAIs can be found on their websites, see useful resources section of this leaflet.

It is important to sit or lie down if you are having an anaphylactic reaction and to remain sitting or lying down while waiting for the ambulance as if you get up and move about it can worsen your reaction and may lead to loss of consciousness.

Make your friends aware of your allergies and what to do if you have an allergic reaction, including the use of your AAI.

Emergency services

Always ring 999 after administering your AAI, in case further treatment is required. You need to be observed in hospital as there is a risk of a biphasic reaction, which is a second wave of symptoms.

It is also important for the ambulance service to be able to find you as quickly as possible. The app What3Words can be download onto your phone and help give your exact geolocation if you are in a remote area.

Managing anaphylaxis without an adrenaline auto-injector (AAI) available

If you have an anaphylactic reaction and you do not have or have not been prescribed an AAI it is important for you to act quickly. Sit down or lie down where you are and call 999. Have someone with you while you are waiting for the ambulance. If AAIs are available nearby, someone else can be sent to retrieve them as it is important that you stay sitting down whilst waiting for the ambulance.

Allergies and asthma

If you also have asthma, it is very important that your asthma is well controlled. Asthma can be exacerbated by your allergies. If you have an allergic reaction, it may be more severe if your asthma is poorly controlled.

It is very important to attend your yearly asthma review with your GP.

Allergy cofactors

Allergy cofactors are factors that may increase the severity of an allergic reaction or make someone more likely to have an allergic reaction. It is important to be aware of cofactors that may affect the severity of reaction you have:

- If you are unwell
- If your asthma is not well controlled
- If you have been doing strenuous exercise
- If you are sleep deprived
- If you have recently taken ibuprofen
- If you have been drinking alcohol
- If you smoke or vape
- If you are on or about to start your period
- If you are very stressed or anxious

If any of these cofactors are present, you may want to be extra careful about checking labels, avoiding “may contain” products and ensuring you carry all your allergy medications.

The severity of the reaction you may have may also be affected by the type of exposure to the allergen:

- If you just touch the food or if you eat the food
- How much you have come into contact with
- What form it is in – fresh, processed, or cooked

Package reading

All prepackaged foods should have a complete list of ingredients and any of the top 14 allergens should be printed in **bold** (though sometimes in *italics* or underlined)

If you are allergic to something that is not one of the top 14 allergens, then you will have to read the full ingredients list to be sure you are not allergic to any of the contents.

It is also important to check the product label every time as recipes can change. Be aware of food items that are not pre-packed, such as food from a bakery, café or deli counter as these products may not have labels and you will need to ask for the allergens.

Some cosmetics, soaps and shampoos contain nut oils. You can always do a patch test on your hand to see if you will react before using/buying any new cosmetic products.

‘May Contain’ products

Some products will have the term ‘may contain...’ on their labels. This means that even though the product does not include the item the manufacturer will not guarantee there is no chance of cross contamination from other items in the factory/production line.

Some people with food allergies will avoid these products while others feel confident to assess the possible risk of the product causing a reaction and decide if it is safe to eat. It is advisable that if you do decide to eat 'may contain' products that you have your allergy medication available in case of a reaction and not to eat them if you are unwell.

Cross-contamination

There is a risk of allergic reaction from cross contamination where the food does not contain the allergens, but it has been in contact with something that does. Places that are more high risk of this are where foods are out on display such as buffets, bakeries, cake stalls and ice cream counters. Also, where equipment is used for multiple food stuffs for examples steam wands in coffee shops for heating milk, and ice cream scoops.

Eating out and drinking

When eating out, many restaurants will clearly state if a dish contains any of the common allergens, however, do not assume recipes will be the same in every restaurant and always make staff aware of your allergies.

Some drinks, including alcoholic drinks, may also contain nuts or dairy. Be more cautious when having mixed drinks i.e. milk shakes and cocktails and check ingredients.

Be aware that alcohol (and drugs) can affect your judgment and impair your ability to make decisions and manage any adverse situations that may arise. Alcohol can also increase the severity of an allergic reaction.

Travelling with allergies

When travelling abroad it is important that you inform the airline of any allergies when booking your holiday. Ensure that, if you should require treatment when abroad, you have adequate travel insurance that will cover this.

It is important that you check that your medications will be in date for the length of time you are away. They should be kept with you in your hand luggage so you have them in easy reach should they be required. If possible, you could get a letter from your GP authorising you to carry emergency medication.

It is important that you try and keep your AAls out of direct sunlight and away from extremes of temperature.

Research the area you are going to, so you are aware what foods are more commonly used in that culture. Find out the words for the things you are allergic to (see useful resources) and inform your hotel of your allergies. Also finding out where the nearest hospital and pharmacy are, and how to contact the emergency services are recommended.

Moving away from home

It is important that when you move away from home that you are registered with a GP so you can access your repeat prescriptions.

If you will be living with others it is important to make them aware of your allergies and how to manage allergens in the environment. If you are in a shared house/flat you may want to think about having your own cupboard with your own cutlery, crockery, pots, and pans, etc. to prevent any cross-contamination. For this reason, it is also important that the kitchen is kept clean after others have used it and you clean surfaces before you prepare your own food.

Relationships

Close contact with someone who has been eating a food that you are allergic may trigger an allergic reaction. This includes sharing drinks or kissing. It would be helpful for them to avoid consuming the allergen or you need to wait a few hours before having close or intimate contact.

Some condoms contain milk protein and may cause a problem if you have a severe milk allergy. If in doubt you can check with the manufacturer to see which brands are milk-free. Latex free condoms are also available for those with a latex allergy.

Future career

You will not be able to have a career in the armed forces if you have a severe allergy and/or carry an adrenaline auto-injector.

When starting in a new workplace, inform your employer of your allergies and taking appropriate measures to reduce the risk of any accidental exposures. Also, inform your colleagues where you keep your AAI and how to use it in an emergency. Extra caution should be taken if you decide to work, or get a part time job, in the food or catering industry.

After the age of 18 years

There is no adult allergy service in the York area, so once you have been discharged by the paediatric service your allergies will usually be managed by your GP.

Once you become an adult, ongoing investigations are usually not required unless your symptoms change. Your GP can refer you to adult allergy services in the region if required in the future.

Please remember to always carry
your EpiPen, Emerade or Jext
As well as your antihistamines and
inhaler (if asthmatic)

Useful resources for people with allergies

Websites:

Allergy UK – www.allergyuk.org

The website provides support, advice, and information for those living with allergies. Website has factsheets on a variety of allergy topics.

Anaphylaxis UK – www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

The website provides online resources, help and support for people at risk of severe allergy reactions.

Asthma UK – www.asthma.org.uk

The website provides support and advice on managing your asthma, also instruction videos on how to use different inhalers

National Eczema Society – www.eczema.org

This website provides information and advice on managing your eczema.

Adrenaline Auto-Injectors

The following websites provide information, resources, and a demonstration video on the use of the different adrenaline auto-injectors:

- **EpiPen** – www.epipen.co.uk/patients
- **Jext** – www.jext.co.uk
- **Emerade** – www.emerade-bausch.co.uk

Apps

There are many apps available to help you manage your allergies, both for food and environmental.

What3Words – Can give a geolocation, within 3 meters, anywhere on the surface of the Earth. Helpful when contacting the emergency services to aid them in finding your location.

Translation cards

Allergyaction.org offer free, printable translation cards.

Allergy UK (www.allergyuk.org) provide translation cards in 35 different languages for over 150 different allergens. See website for costs.

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:

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yhs-tr.paediatricallergyysth@nhs.net.

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 yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:
www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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