



# Allergies — Understanding and managing your symptoms

Watery eyes, itchiness, runny nose. Does this sound familiar? If so, you might have allergies.

Allergies happen when your immune system has a bad response to something that's usually harmless — tree pollen, dust, pet hair, or certain foods. The immune system identifies these things as dangerous, setting off an allergic reaction, like sneezing or a rash.

## What causes allergies?

Allergies can develop at any age. Family history and the environment, including where you live, can play a role. If both your parents have allergies, you'll probably have allergies, but you may not be allergic to the same things or have the same reactions.



### 10 common allergy triggers

1. Pollen
2. Mold
3. Food
4. Dust
5. Pet dander
6. Insect bites
7. Medicines
8. Latex
9. Jewelry
10. Perfumes and lotions

## Signs and symptoms



### Allergy symptoms can range from mild to severe. Some common signs are:

- Breathing problems
- Diarrhea, stomach cramps, or vomiting
- Headache
- Itchy eyes, nose, mouth, throat, or skin
- Runny or stuffy nose, coughing, and sneezing
- Skin rash or hives
- Watery, red, or swollen eyes
- Wheezing



To find a doctor or allergy specialist near you, use the Sydney<sup>SM</sup> Health mobile app or visit [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com).

## What can you do?

The best way to reduce your symptoms is to avoid the things that cause your allergies. Sometimes, that's not so simple to do. It might be easy to stay away from certain foods or medicines. But if your allergy trigger comes from the air around you, it can be hard to avoid.

Talk with your doctor about your allergies. They may want to do a skin or blood test to pinpoint the specific type of allergy you have. They may also have you avoid certain foods or other allergy triggers to see if you get better.

## How to allergy-proof your surroundings



**Air filters:** Change your furnace and air conditioner filter each season. Using a small particle or HEPA filter is best.



**Bed and bedding:** Wash your sheets, pillowcases, and blankets at least once a week in hot water. Use covers for pillows, mattresses, and box springs to guard against dust mites.



**Cleaning:** Dust often, avoid harsh chemicals, and wear a mask when you vacuum, clean, work in the garden, or mow the lawn.



**Floors:** If you can, get hardwood or linoleum floors instead of carpet. If you have carpet or rugs, vacuum at least once a week.



**Smoking:** Don't let anyone smoke in your home. Avoid cigarette smoke when you go out.



**Temperature:** Dust mites and mold love hot, humid houses. Keep the temperature in your home at 70°F and the humidity under 50% to prevent mold from growing.



**Windows:** Keep them closed and use air conditioning if you're allergic to pollen.

## Treatment

Allergies can't be cured, but there are ways to relieve your symptoms. Treatment depends on the type of allergy you have and how bad it is. Avoiding your allergy triggers is an important first step. Medicines or allergy shots might also help, but the shots usually need to be given over a few years before they are completely effective.

Severe allergic reactions, called anaphylaxis, need to be treated with a medicine called epinephrine, commonly known as an EpiPen. It can save a person's life if the shot is given immediately after a severe allergic reaction.

Sources:  
Mayo Clinic: Allergies (accessed July 2022); [mayoclinic.com](https://www.mayoclinic.com).  
Mayo Clinic: Allergy-proof your home (accessed July 2022); [mayoclinic.com](https://www.mayoclinic.com).

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