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All about allergy testing



Allergies often heat up in the summer, when allergens such as grass, mold and ragweed pollen bring on symptoms like watery eyes and sneezing. Outdoor picnics and activities can pose more serious dangers for people who are allergic to certain foods or stinging insects.

It may seem that discovering what you are allergic to is a guessing game. However, testing performed by a board-certified allergist can diagnose what does and what does not trigger your symptoms. For example, you don't have to get rid of your cat if it is actually mold that is causing your itchy eyes and throat. Once you know exactly what you are allergic to, you and your doctor will be able to develop a treatment plan to reduce or eliminate your allergy symptoms.

Should I be tested?

Many people with untreated allergy symptoms aren't aware of how much better they can feel once their symptoms are properly diagnosed and managed. If

you are troubled by any of these nagging symptoms, ask your doctor for a referral to an allergist:

- Itchy eyes, nose and throat
- Nasal congestion or runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Hives, itchiness or other skin conditions
- Abdominal pain or diarrhea after eating certain foods
- Severe reactions to insect stings

Types of allergy tests

Allergy tests are the best and safest way to tell exactly what triggers your symptoms. Common triggers include: dust mites, animal dander, molds, pollen, cockroach droppings, stinging insects, foods, latex and drugs.

• **Prick tests:** This is the most common kind of testing. In this test, a small amount of allergen is placed on your skin, and this area is pricked or scratched. If you are allergic, you'll experience a little swelling at the site of the prick test. Results of this test are usually available within 15 minutes.

• **Intradermal tests:** Intradermal tests are more sensitive than prick tests, and may be used when prick test results are inconclusive. In this test, your allergist will use a syringe to inject some allergen under your skin.

• **Challenge tests:** Challenge tests are sometimes used when a doctor suspects

you have a food or drug allergy. In this test, patients eat or inhale a very small amount of possible allergens under the close supervision of an allergist. **Do not try this test at home!**

• **Blood (RAST) tests:** In a RAST test, blood is drawn and then tested for allergies. This test costs more than some other tests. It will also take longer to receive your results.

Allergy testing should always be done under the supervision of a board-certified allergist/immunologist. Once you receive your test results, your allergist can work with you to develop a treatment plan to manage your allergies.

To find an allergist near you, visit www.aaaai.org/phsyref.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some healthcare providers may use alternative allergy testing methods, such as applied kinesiology or skin titration. The AAAAI does not believe such tests are useful or effective, and encourages everyone to see a board-certified allergist/immunologist for appropriate allergy testing.

An allergist/immunologist is the best-qualified medical expert to diagnose and treat allergies. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the Physician Referral Directory at www.aaaai.org.

For more information on allergies, please visit the Patients & Consumers Center of the AAAAI Web site, www.aaaai.org.

To the Point

- A nationwide survey found that more than half of all U.S. citizens test positive to one or more allergens.
- Common allergy tests include skin tests, intradermal tests, challenge tests, and blood or RAST tests.
- Avoid at-home allergy tests, which may not test for a full range of possible allergens, or give false negative or false positive results.
- Always see a board-certified allergist for allergy testing and treatment.



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