

What should I know about allergies and allergy relief?

1. Why do people get allergic reactions?

Allergies are extremely common – they're believed to affect more than a quarter of people in the UK at some point during their lives. Children are particularly affected by allergies; some will grow out of the reactions as they age, while other allergies last a lifetime.

Allergies are caused by the body's immune system overreacting to a substance. The immune system is the natural defence against infection, and produces antibodies to fight bacteria and viruses. An allergic reaction occurs when the immune system fights something that would normally be harmless – for example pollen, medication, or food. The immune system creates histamines, which are chemicals that your body uses to get rid of unwanted substances.

The majority of allergic reactions are relatively mild, causing a rash, itchy eyes, nausea, runny nose, or stomach problems. Mild reactions can easily be treated at home.

Severe reactions are far more uncommon, and can result in trouble breathing and the need for medical intervention. Allergies may cause other problems, such as wheezing, coughing, nosebleeds, and other issues.

You can develop allergies to substances you have never reacted to before – adults can develop an allergy at any time, to something you may have encountered many times before. The immune system response can increase over time; a bee may have stung you with no significant response in the past, but the next time it happens, you may experience a rash, increased swelling, or breathing trouble.

2. What types of substances are common causes of allergies?

Substances that result in allergies are known as allergens. The majority of allergens are harmless to anyone without an allergy to them, but cause a response ranging from mild to severe for those with an allergy.

Some allergens are part of a family, and all members of that family may cause the reaction – for example someone who is allergic to peanuts is likely to also be allergic to other tree nuts.

Many different substances cause allergies – in fact, almost anything can become an allergen. Some of the common allergies are:

- Food-related allergies, including nuts, shellfish, milk, tomatoes, and eggs. Food allergies are common in people with a tendency to have other allergies and asthmatic conditions.
- Animal-related allergies. These can be a reaction to fur, saliva, or dander (dead skin). Animal-related allergies often cause breathing problems rather than skin issues.
- Pollen-related allergies. Grass and pollen allergies are usually referred to as hay fever.
- Mould allergies react to spores or particles released into the air and result in breathing problems.
- Cosmetics and household chemical allergies. Skin contact with these types of allergens will usually result in a reaction.
- Latex allergies. Latex is used in the production of gloves and condoms, and allergies can develop as a result of repeated exposure. Some fruits are technically part of the latex family and may cause a reaction in someone who has developed a latex allergy, including avocados, bananas, and kiwi fruit.
- Bee, wasp, and other insect allergies. These are allergies to insect venom, which is introduced to the body when you are stung or bitten by an insect. Not all reactions to insect bites constitute an allergy – it is perfectly normal to have a small reaction of redness, swelling, and itching. If the immune system overreacts to the sting, this is an allergic reaction. Bee and wasp allergies can result in severe reactions.
- Medication-related allergies. All medications can cause an allergic reaction, though painkillers and certain antibiotics are common causes. Allergic reactions to medication can be unpredictable and it is difficult to predict the severity of a reaction, as this will vary from person to person.

3. What types of remedies are available for allergies?

If you think you or your child has an allergy, perhaps because of a potential allergic reaction, you should begin by seeing your doctor. The symptoms you

experience may have other causes, so it's important to see a medical professional to determine whether an allergy is behind the reaction.

Your doctor may refer you for allergy testing or a consultation with an allergist. If you have a severe allergy, the allergist will be able to help you with advice on treating and managing the allergy to keep you safe.

Managing allergies - avoidance

If you can, avoiding the allergen is the best approach for dealing with an allergy. If you're allergic to a specific food, cosmetic product, or substance like latex, you should try to avoid coming into contact with it wherever possible.

With food allergies, such as nuts, milk, soya, or oats, you should be vigilant in checking food labels for information. The Food Standards Agency provides some useful [information about food allergen labelling](#).

If you have a latex allergy, make sure you inform your doctor and any other medical professional you come into contact with, so that they can use non-latex gloves when treating you.

You can also allergy-proof your home to reduce potential for allergic reactions.

- Remove anything you're allergic to
- Hoover regularly, at least weekly, to remove pollens, dust, and other allergens. You should Hoover both your floors and your furniture.
- Take your shoes off at the front door, to avoid bringing pollen into your home, and wash clothing that has come into contact with pollen.
- Keep your doors and windows closed during peak pollen season.
- Use dust-proof covers on your mattress and pillows.
- Use allergen-free or sensitive products for cleaning your home.

Managing allergies – medication

There are various medications that you can take to help manage the symptoms and severity of allergic reactions. Some are over the counter (OTC) medications, while others require a prescription from your doctor.

Immunotherapy is an alternative approach to treating severe allergies. This treatment involves being exposed to an allergen in a very controlled, medically-led manner, to acclimatise the body to the substance and reduce the

severity of a reaction. This type of treatment is generally reserved for severe allergies that can cause significant problems.

Medications are usually a first resort, and may include:

- Antihistamines are available over the counter, are commonly used for hayfever, and can be taken to help once you've started having a reaction, or pre-emptively when you know you will be exposed to something you are allergic to.
- Lotions, emollients, and creams are used to treat skin reactions to allergens.
- Decongestants can be used as a short-term solution to blocked noses caused by allergies, including hay fever.
- Steroid medications are used to reduce redness and swelling resulting from an allergic reaction. They can come in various formats, including tablets, creams, sprays, and inhalers. Steroids usually require a prescription.

4. Are there any alternative remedies for allergies?

If you have an allergy that is not severe but causes regular discomfort, hay fever for example, you may prefer to treat it with an alternative remedy. The benefit of alternative therapies is reducing reliance on regular medication.

Herbal supplements

You should discuss your intentions to explore herbal treatments with your doctor before you start using them, as some can interact with other medications you may be taking, and others may affect your blood pressure, liver, or kidneys, and should be taken with care.

- Green tea is a known antioxidant and antihistamine. If you sip one to two cups a day before hayfever season begins, you may be able to avoid some of the congestion.
- Licorice root raises the body's levels of natural steroids and may reduce allergic severity and potentially loosen mucus so you can breathe easier. Licorice root should be taken with caution as it can cause high blood pressure, and it should be avoided by pregnant women.
- Butterbur is a herb that may block allergies in a similar way to OTC allergy medications. Again, you should use caution as some butterbur supplements may contain an ingredient that could cause liver and lung

damage. It is also not suitable if you have an allergy to daisy, marigold, or ragweed.

Diet

Obviously you should remove from your diet any foods that you are allergic to, as well as any other foods in the same family. If you have not yet been formally diagnosed with a food allergy, keeping a food diary can be an effective way to identify allergens within your diet, and a useful document to share with your allergist.

Some foods can exacerbate allergic reactions, even if you are not specifically allergic to that item itself. If you experience reactions to pollen, ragweed, and other weeds, you should avoid sunflower seeds, cucumber, bananas, and melon. All of these foods can make the symptoms of a pollen allergy worse.

If you're experiencing congestion as a symptom, eating hot and spicy food can give you some relief. Cayenne pepper, ginger, or horseradish can help to clear your nasal passages.

Nasal rinsing

Another way to clear the nasal passage is to use a nasal rinsing technique. Using a neti pot, which looks a little like a teapot, you rinse out each nostril to flush out dust and pollen.

You must only ever use sterile or distilled water in a neti pot or nasal rinse, to prevent introducing bacteria to your nose.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a popular treatment for many ailments, including the symptoms of allergies. A single treatment may give some relief, but for ongoing allergies, you will likely need a course of treatments over a number of weeks.

5. What is 'red light therapy' for allergies?

Red Light Therapy is becoming increasingly popular for a number of purposes, including anti-ageing and treating skin conditions. It is also an effective method of dealing with allergy issues, especially hayfever symptoms.

Infrared Allergy Treatment is a method of relieving allergy symptoms, including congestion, runny nose, red and itchy eyes, sneezing, irritation and itching in the nose and mouth, and coughing. By applying infrared light directly into the nostrils, allergy symptoms lessen and can be more easily managed.

What is Infrared Light?

Infrared light is a wavelength of light that is not visible to the naked eye. Visible light that is detectable by the human eye covers wavelengths from 390 to 750nm on the electromagnetic spectrum. Wavelengths that are above 750nm are infrared.

How is Infrared Light used for allergy therapy?

In order to use infrared light to treat allergies, you will need an allergy reliever machine. These machines are small devices that contain two LED lights that emit infrared light. You place the device into each nostril and turn on the lights for a set amount of time, depending on your specific device. Two sessions each day are usually enough to experience some symptom relief, but a third treatment would be needed to completely treat your allergy symptoms.

Allergy reliever machines are [class 11A medical devices](#). They use dual wavelength light therapy, meaning they emit two different wavelengths of light. One wavelength is used to improve blood flow and circulation, while the second is used to suppress the cells that release histamine. Suppressing these cells reduces inflammation and irritation.

Is Infrared Therapy effective?

NetDoctor reports a University trial that found 72% of participants with hayfever reported their symptoms were reduced and their overall condition was improved, through the use of infrared light as allergy relief.

Self-reports of the effectiveness of this technique can be found across the internet, from user reports on various forums and discussion boards. Generally, users reported positive effects after using the treatment for 2 weeks. As a result, it is recommended that you start treatment 2 weeks prior to allergy seasons to get the best effect from the device.

As different types of pollen become active at different times of year, you should keep an eye on pollen counts and trends to work out when it would be

best to begin. But as there is no negative effect from the treatment, there should be no harm in starting early.

6. What should I look for in an Allergy Reliever device?

If you are considering using infrared light to treat your allergies, you'll need to find the most appropriate device for you.

You'll want to look for a device with the following features, to make

- Easy to use
- Has a built-in timer so you know how long each use
- Changeable nose probes so that the whole family can use the device
- Portable so you can keep it with you when you're out and about
- Is battery operated so you aren't tied to only using it indoors
- Is well-reviewed on sites like Amazon, so you can see what other users have to say

7. Where can I find more information?

We hope this guide has been useful to you. If you would like to find more information, we recommend the following sources, all of which we have drawn upon for details and advice in this ebook.

WebMD – <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/tc/allergic-reaction-topic-overview>

National Health Service – <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Allergies/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Health Guide Info - <http://www.healthguideinfo.com/allergy-testing-treatment/p106166/>

NetDoctor - <http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/healthy-living/a3047/hay-fever-complementary-therapies/>