

Health Beat

HEALTH, MIND & BODY

Do I Have Allergies?



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symptoms and what allergens you believe trigger your symptoms. The triggers that are commonly tested, include:

- Airborne allergies—pollen, grasses, trees, weeds, molds, and dust mites.
- Animal allergies—hair or dander of household pets, rabbits, horses, or rodents.
- Drug allergies—proteins in certain medications can cause responses such as hives or anaphylaxis, a life-threatening condition.
- Food allergies—such as nuts, shellfish, fish, eggs, and milk.
- Insect allergies—a reaction to an insect sting or insect debris.

Testing and Diagnosing Your Allergies

To pinpoint your allergy, your doctor may also run allergy tests to determine what causes your allergic reactions and the severity of your allergies. The tests will help the doctor create a treatment plan to help control your symptoms.

The test may include:

- Skin test—small amounts of potential allergens are applied to your arms or back. If you are allergic, you will develop a hive at the test site. Your doctor

may start with a scratch test, by placing the allergen on your skin by scratching the outer layer of skin. If those results are unclear, your doctor may inject a small amount of the allergen under your skin to monitor the reaction.

- Patch testing—a patch containing cosmetics, common chemicals or other products are placed on your skin to test for a delayed allergic reaction.
- Blood test—to measure the amount of allergy-causing antibodies in your blood.
- Elimination test—by eliminating foods and slowly adding them back into your diet, your doctor can monitor reactions to determine allergic reactions.
- Drug challenges—a small amount of the drug you are allergic to is given to you in gradually increased doses, while nurses closely watch you for a reaction. This is effective for adults who have been told they are allergic to penicillin or another drug.
- Food challenges—under careful observation, you are given the food you have been avoiding testing for an allergic reaction.

- Spirometry—measures the volume of air your lung breathes in or out.

You may experience some discomfort and exaggerated symptoms as a result of the testing, but your doctor will monitor you closely during the appointment. You may also receive some medication or cream to help alleviate the symptoms.

Once you and your doctor have determined what allergens are causing your symptoms, a personalized treatment plan can be created. Treatment may include over-the-counter medications, prescription antihistamines, nasal sprays, inhalers, or immunotherapy. Immunotherapy is a long-term therapy given by injection weekly or biweekly for three-to-five years. The therapy desensitizes your immune system to the allergens that trigger your symptoms. It is the closest thing to a "cure" for allergic symptoms.

Dr. Nathaniel Hare is a board certified in Internal Medicine and Allergy and Immunology. He sees patients at SH Allergy at River Avenue, 451 River Ave., Williamsport. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Hare, call 570-320-7070.

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