


# IN GOOD HEALTH

A Publication Compiled by the Clinical Pharmacy Team of  **Health Solutions**  
PHARMACY BENEFITS MANAGEMENT

## ALLERGIES - EDUCATE YOURSELF

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, more than 50 million Americans suffer from allergic diseases. Since Rite Aid is committed to providing products and services that help our patients lead healthier, happier lives, we have worked with the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) to obtain information to help develop a patient allergy guide.

### What is an allergy?

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to an ordinary substance called an allergen.

- **Indoor allergens** include house-dust mites, cockroach droppings, mold-spores, cigarette smoke, and pet dander.
- **Outdoor allergens** include pollen and mold spores.
- **Occupational allergens** include wood, dust, latex, resins, organic dusts (flour) and various chemicals.

In addition, food and medications can cause an allergic reaction. When an allergen is absorbed into the body of an allergic person, that person's immune system views the allergen as an invader and a chain reaction is initiated. White blood cells of the immune system produce IgE antibodies. These antibodies attach themselves to mast cells, causing a release of potent chemicals such as histamine and other mediators (e.g. kinins, prostaglandins, and leukotrienes). These chemical mediators cause symptoms such as a rhinorrhea, lacrimation, pruritis, sneezing, urticaria, hives or swelling.

### What are the different types of allergic reactions?

- **Seasonal allergic rhinitis**, sometimes called "hay fever," is caused by an allergy to the pollen of trees, grasses, weeds or mold spores. Depending on the type of allergy, the section of the country and the pollination periods, seasonal allergic rhinitis may occur in the spring, summer or fall, and may last until the first frost. Symptoms include sneezing, itching and tearing of the eyes, runny nose, burning on the roof of the mouth and throat. Seasonal allergies also can trigger asthma.
- **Allergic rhinitis** is a term used to apply to anyone who has symptoms of nasal congestion, sneezing and a runny nose due to allergies. This may be a seasonal problem as with hay fever, or it may be a year-round problem caused by indoor aeroallergens. Frequently, this problem is complicated by sinusitis. Patients with persistent nasal symptoms should consult their allergist.
- **Eczema or atopic dermatitis** is a non-contagious, red, chaplike, crusty, scaly, itching rash that often occurs on the hands, arms, legs, face, forehead and neck, although it can cover the entire body. The primary symptom of atopic dermatitis is intense, itchy bumps and blisters. This condition is frequently associated with allergies, and substances to which a person is sensitive may aggravate it.

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- **Contact dermatitis** is a reaction affecting areas of the skin which become red, itchy and inflamed after contact with allergens or irritants (i.e. plants, cosmetics, medications, metals, chemicals). Signs and symptoms of contact dermatitis depend on the allergen, site, and duration of the exposure and individual factors. Typically, the skin appears red and swollen. Bumps or blisters may also appear. They may ooze and drain prior to forming crusts or scales. Itching, burning, and pain/tenderness are common symptoms.
- **Urticaria or hives** are red, itchy, swollen areas of the skin that can vary in size and appear anywhere on the body. Most common are acute cases, where the cause is readily identifiable as a reaction to a viral infection, medication, food or latex. Some people have chronic hives that occur almost daily for months to years, with no identifiable trigger. It is not red or itchy and most often occurs in soft tissue, such as the eyelids or mouth. Hives and angioedema (large, swollen areas under the skin) may appear together or separately on the body.

## **Can allergies be cured?**

The tendency to have allergies is genetically inherited. Thus, instead of a cure, patients should work with their allergist to keep their allergies under control. Successful treatment of allergies includes early detection, proper usage of medications and simple allergen avoidance techniques.