

Patient information

Low Risk Penicillin Allergies

Information about testing for penicillin allergies.

Many people report allergies to antibiotics, especially to penicillin. Many penicillin allergies disappear after a few years. You may be able to take a simple test to see if you still have a penicillin allergy.

This document should not replace the advice of your relevant health care professional.

What is a penicillin allergy?

A penicillin allergy is a bad reaction to penicillin. It can be serious (life threatening) or mild.

Signs of a penicillin allergy include:

- anaphylaxis (a serious, life threatening allergic reaction to foreign substances such as some medicines, food or insect bites)
- very low blood pressure
- weak and/or rapid pulse or heartbeat
- rash
- swollen lips or tongue.

What is a low risk penicillin allergy?

A low risk penicillin allergy causes mild symptoms. You may have a low risk penicillin allergy if you have:

- had mild rash(es) during your childhood
- experienced rashes on small parts of your body
- had an unexplained reaction more than 10 years ago.

90% (9 out of 10) of these reactions to penicillin are lost over time or may not have been caused by penicillin in the first place.

If you think you have an allergy to an penicillin, you will need to take a test to be certain.

How to know if you have a low risk penicillin allergy

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will work with you to find out if you have either a low risk or high risk penicillin allergy. You will be asked questions and it is important you can give as much information as possible. If your doctor thinks you have a low risk penicillin allergy they will ask you to have an 'Oral Penicillin Challenge Test'. This test is simple and safe.

What is the Oral Penicillin Challenge Test?

For this test, you will be asked to swallow one capsule (a small amount) of the penicillin. A nurse will watch you closely for two hours to see if you have an allergic reaction. If there is no reaction during this time, then you do not have an allergy to penicillin.

Benefits of taking the Oral Penicillin Challenge Test

By doing the test, you will find out if you still have a penicillin allergy.

If your test shows you no longer have a penicillin allergy, then your doctor has more antibiotics to choose from. You are more likely to get the best and safest antibiotic for an infection. For you, this means having a quicker recovery.

Is the Oral Penicillin Challenge Test safe?

Yes, the test is safe. This test has been taken by thousands of people across the world. After the test, many people have discovered that they are able to safely take penicillin.

During the test, you are watched closely by your healthcare team. If you develop an allergic reaction, they will treat you immediately.

What happens after you have had the test?

You and your doctors will be notified of the test results.

You will each receive a letter explaining:

- the name of the test and your results
- the names of antibiotics that are safest for you.

All results will be placed in your medical history.



For further information please visit:

<https://antibioticallergy.org.au>

Email: antibiotic.allergy@austin.org.au

In the event of an emergency, please dial 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.