

LOW RISK PENICILLIN ALLERGIES



Peter Mac
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Victoria Australia

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.

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, 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 small 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 and may not have been caused by penicillin.

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

How to know if you have a low risk penicillin allergy

Your Peter Mac healthcare team 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 healthcare team think 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. Our 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 for 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 safely 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.

More information

For more information, please visit:

<https://antibioticallergy.org.au>



Contact us

For more information or advice about this factsheet, please call the Infectious Diseases Department on 8559-7477 from Monday to Friday between 9:00am to 4:00pm.

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