

Do I still have an antibiotic allergy?

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

Many people report allergies to antibiotics, especially to penicillin. Many antibiotic allergies disappear after a few years. You may be able to take a test to find out if you still have an antibiotic allergy. The test result will help you to get the best and safest antibiotics to help you recover more quickly from an infection, now or in the future.

What is an antibiotic allergy?

An antibiotic allergy happens when the body's immune system reacts to an antibiotic it does not like. When this happens, the immune system produces allergy symptoms. An antibiotic allergy can be serious (life-threatening) or mild.

Serious (life-threatening) allergies to antibiotics include:

- anaphylaxis (an allergic reaction to substances such as medicines, foods or insect bites). Symptoms or signs of anaphylaxis include:
 - very low blood pressure
 - weak and/or rapid pulse or heartbeat
 - rash with other symptoms, developing quickly after exposure to the substance
 - swollen lips or tongue

If you experience any signs or symptoms of anaphylaxis, you should immediately call 000 for urgent medical assistance.

- rash, accompanied by becoming very unwell

You may have a mild antibiotic allergy if you have:

- had rash(es) during or soon after finishing a course of antibiotics prescribed in childhood or a long time ago
- rashes on small parts of your body during or soon after a course of antibiotics
- had an unexplained reaction to an antibiotic more than 10 years ago.

Many antibiotic allergy reactions go away over time or may not have been caused by the antibiotic. If you think you have an allergy to an antibiotic, you may need to take a test to be certain.

Is allergy testing appropriate for me?

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will work with you to find out if your reaction was serious (life-threatening) or mild. You will be asked some questions and it is important to give as much information as possible. Your specialist doctor will recommend if antibiotic allergy testing is appropriate for you and which test(s) are best for you based upon the information you give. You are encouraged to ask questions to help you decide if you want to take the recommended test(s).

What tests can I take to find out if I still have an antibiotic allergy?

Two main types of tests are used. These are:

- a skin test
- an oral challenge test

Depending on the doctor's assessment, you may or may not have a skin test before proceeding to an oral challenge test.

What is a skin test?

During the skin test, tiny injections of different antibiotics are put just under the skin by a doctor or nurse. A positive control test with histamine is used to check that your skin is reacting normally. The test is very safe and is well tolerated by most people. A skin test takes about four hours to complete.

If you have an allergy to any of the antibiotics used, you will get a small reaction on the skin that looks like a mosquito bite. This usually appears within five to ten minutes and fades after sixty minutes.

A mild reaction may appear a few days after the test, but this is very rare. We will give you a letter to take home with a phone number to call if you notice anything unusual you think might be related to the test.

If you don't have any reaction, this test is often followed by an oral challenge – see below.

What is the oral challenge test?

For this test, you will be asked to swallow a small amount of the antibiotic. A nurse will watch you closely for two hours to see if you have any reaction. It will take you about two hours to take the oral challenge test and to get your results.

A mild rash may appear a few days after the test, but this is very rare. We will give you a letter to take home with a phone number to call if you notice anything unusual you think might be related to the test.

Benefits of taking an allergy test

- You will find out if you have an antibiotic allergy by taking the test(s) recommended by your specialist doctor.
- If your test shows you no longer have the antibiotic allergy, you are more likely to get the best and safest antibiotic for an infection. For you, this may mean having a quicker recovery.

Are the allergy tests safe?

- Yes, the tests are safe.
- The tests have been taken by thousands of people across the world. After the test, most people have found out they can safely take the antibiotic they believe they were allergic to.
- About 80% (eight out of ten) of people who take an antibiotic allergy test find out they do not have an antibiotic allergy anymore.
- During the test(s), you will be closely watched by your specialist doctor or nurse. If you have an allergic reaction, the test will stop and you will be treated immediately. Our doctors and nurses are experts in treating allergic reactions.
- You will only be tested if your specialist doctor thinks your risk of still having the antibiotic allergy is low.

What happens after you have had the test(s)?

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

You will receive a letter explaining:

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

We will remove the antibiotic allergy from your medical record if your test(s) show you do not have an antibiotic allergy.



Contact information:

Organisation

Phone number

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