

Latex Allergy

What is a latex allergy?

Latex is made from a milky fluid that comes from the rubber tree. It is used to make many products used at home and in healthcare, like gloves.

A latex allergy is a reaction by your immune system when you have contact with a product made with latex.

What is the cause?

If you are allergic to latex, your body reacts to proteins in the latex as harmful and tries to protect you.

You may be more likely to have a latex allergy if you have had a lot of medical procedures or you work in healthcare and have used latex products, such as gloves or other equipment.

Some foods contain proteins similar to the proteins in latex. If you have allergies to these foods, you may be more likely to have a latex allergy. Foods having proteins most similar to the proteins in latex are bananas, avocado, kiwi, and chestnuts.

What are the symptoms?

If you think you are allergic to latex, it's important to get a diagnosis from your healthcare provider or allergist. Symptoms can develop over several hours or they may start right away and be severe. They may include:

- Skin reactions, such as itching, hives, eczema, or swelling
- Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or itching around the mouth
- Runny nose, wheezing, or trouble breathing
- Fast heartbeat

It is also possible to have an allergic reaction called anaphylactic shock. This is a serious, life-threatening allergic reaction. The reaction is sudden and severe and involves the whole body. Symptoms of a severe reaction include:

- Rash or hives
- Swelling of the lips, face, or throat
- Trouble breathing, often with wheezing
- Lightheadedness
- Fast or pounding heartbeat
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fainting

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history. You may have a blood test.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for latex allergy symptoms. If you are having a mild skin reaction, you may be able to treat it with steroid cream.

If you think you are having a severe reaction, go to the emergency room or call 911 for help. A severe reaction usually needs to be treated with shots of medicine.

How can I take care of myself?

- Avoid contact with things that may contain latex. Any item that can be stretched may contain latex. Examples of products that may contain latex are:
 - Many kinds of gloves
 - Baby care items such as pacifiers, bottle nipples, and disposable diapers
 - Some clothing items like sport shoes, raincoats, and elastic on underwear
 - Dental dams used during dental procedures
 - Some tapes and bandages
 - Medical supplies such as iv tubing, catheters, blood pressure cuffs, stethoscopes, and medicine bottles
 - Rubber balloons (mylar balloons are OK)
 - Toys such as tennis balls, beach and water toys, and the hand grips on racquets and bicycles
 - School, office, or craft supplies, like paint, glue, rubber bands, and erasers
 - Zippered plastic storage bags
 - Rubber conveyer belts at store checkout stands

There are many things made from vinyl, plastic, or silicone that can be used instead of latex products.

- If you have had a severe reaction, your provider may prescribe an epinephrine emergency kit. You will need to always carry the kit with you. It contains a ready-to-use syringe of the medicine epinephrine. If you have a severe allergic reaction, a shot of this medicine can counteract allergy symptoms until you get medical care. You or someone with you can give you the shot. The kit is not intended as the sole treatment of an allergic reaction. Rather, it "buys" time while you wait for emergency help. You should check the expiration date for this medicine and replace it as needed to make sure it will work.
- If you have an epinephrine shot kit, check the expiration date for the medicine and replace it as needed to make sure it will work.
- Wear a bracelet or necklace that warns of your allergy and tells what to do in case of an emergency. Tell your family, friends, and co-workers what they should do if you have a severe reaction.

- Tell all healthcare providers, including dentists, that you have a latex allergy. Make sure that your medical records have a latex allergy alert.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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