



Know Your Medicines



Drug Allergies



Hong Kong Baptist Hospital
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www.hkbh.org.hk

Drug Allergy Q & A

♦♦-Commonly Asked Questions-♦♦

What is Drug Allergy ?

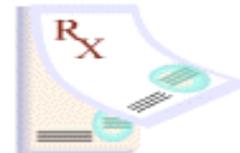


The body's immune system protects us against foreign substances. When the body encounters such substances, the immune system will start off a series of reactions to eliminate substances harmful to the body. Allergens are substances that cause drug allergies, and it does so by triggering the immune system to cause a chain of responses. Too big a response may cause patients harm.

Drug allergies usually do not occur on the first intake of the drug. When the body first encounters the drug, it produces a protein called IgE (immunoglobulin E), which binds to receptors found on cells. When the body encounters the drug again at a later time, the drug and receptor bind, causing the cell to burst and release its chemicals, which cause allergic reactions.

Am I Having An Allergic Response?

Mild Response: Skin rashes (e.g. urticaria), itch, swelling (e.g. of lips or eyelids) , sneezing, etc.



Moderate Response:

Gradual spread of rash or itchiness over all parts of the body, shortness of breath, etc.



Severe Response (Anaphylaxis): Rare but can be fatal. Patients will usually present with the above symptoms which may worsen within a few minutes into more serious symptoms such as headache, nausea, vomiting, swelling of the throat leading to breathing difficulties, seizures, irregular heartbeat, low blood pressure, coma, and even death.



Symptoms may present within minutes or days of intake, and may last from minutes to hours. The effect depends on the amount of drug taken and the severity of the allergy. Allergies are associated with family and drug history, gender, and age. Hence different people



have different responses to drugs.

What Drugs Cause



Allergic Reactions?

Theoretically, any drug may cause allergies. Here is a non-exhaustive list of drugs that commonly cause allergies:

- **Painkillers:** e.g. aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), morphine, codeine
- **Antibiotics:** e.g. penicillins, cephalosporins, sulphonamides, tetracyclines

People More Susceptible To Allergies

- Patients on long term treatment or taking multiple doses
- Patients taking large amounts of medicines
- Injectable medicines are more likely to cause allergies than medicines ingested orally
- Patients with a familial history of asthma or allergies
- Patients with food allergies (e.g. to egg, soya beans, shellfish) need to be careful of drugs that are derived from or consist of such food substances



Does Allergic Reaction = Side Effect?

Drug allergies and a drug's side effects are not the same. Drug allergy is a type of body immune response and is unpredictable. A drug's side

effects – what the drug does to different organs and systems can be predicted by pharmacology. For example, ingesting penicillin can cause stomach upset, NSAIDs can cause stomachache, and some drugs that lower blood pressure can cause cough or syncope etc. – these are side effects, not allergic reactions. If you have any questions, please consult your doctor or your pharmacist.

Preventing & Handling Drug Allergies

There are different ways of handling drug allergies, e.g. by having a skin or blood test to diagnose the allergy, trying drug substitutes, or trying desensitization treatment (for drugs which cannot be substituted). Doctors may prescribe steroids or antihistamines, according to the allergic symptoms presented. If you have a drug allergy or have felt unwell after using a particular drug, remember to tell your doctor or pharmacist at each appointment. It is advisable to make a list of medicines you are allergic to and show it to medical staff to ensure safe use of medicines.



HK Baptist Hospital Drug Allergy Record:

香港浸信會醫院 HONG KONG BAPTIST HOSPITAL 藥物敏感記錄 Drug Allergy Record	
姓名 Name: _____	_____
醫院編號 Hosp. No.: _____	_____
Fill in your name, as on Registration Card	Fill in hospital number, as on your Card
每次就診時，請出示此咭給你的醫生。 Please present this card to your doctor in every consultation.	
敏感藥物名稱 Name of Allergy Drug(s):	
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
Fill in the drug names you are allergic to	

Drug Allergy Record cards are available from the Hong Kong Baptist Hospital Pharmacy.

This leaflet is for reference only.
Use medicines according to your doctor's instructions.
If you have any queries, consult your doctor or pharmacist.
Drug Enquiries Hotline: ☎ 2339-8964

HK Baptist Hospital Website: www.hkbh.org.hk

Published by HK Baptist Hospital Pharmacy 12/2010