Severe allergy (anaphylaxis) and your EpiPen

How to spot it, how to use your adrenaline pen properly, and how to stay safe

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis (say “ana-fill-axis”) is a severe allergic reaction that comes on within minutes of a trigger. It affects breathing and blood pressure and can be life-threatening. An adrenaline auto-injector such as an **EpiPen** is the first and most important treatment: it works in minutes and buys time until the ambulance arrives.

Signs of anaphylaxis: think A, B, C

A – Airway

Swollen throat or tongue, hoarse voice, trouble swallowing

B – Breathing

Short of breath, wheezing, a cough that won't stop

C – Circulation

Faint or dizzy, pale and clammy, drowsy, collapse

A rash, hives, swollen lips or eyes, tummy pain or being sick often come first, but they can be missing. **If in doubt, use your pen.**

Common triggers

Foods

Peanuts, tree nuts, milk, egg, fish, shellfish, sesame

Stings

Wasps and bees

Medicines

Some antibiotics, painkillers and anaesthetics

Latex

Rubber gloves, balloons

Other

Exercise after certain foods, or no cause found

Milder allergies

Pets, pollen, dust mites and mould: usually hay fever or asthma

Who is more at risk of a severe reaction

Asthma | **Anaphylaxis before** | **Teenagers and young adults** | **Nut or shellfish allergy** | **Heart disease** | **Not carrying pens**

Every day

- Carry **two** in-date pens at all times
- Keep your asthma well controlled
- Practise with a free trainer pen
- Avoid your trigger and read food labels
- Wear a medical alert bracelet or card
- Share your allergy action plan

Please turn over for how to use your EpiPen, what to do next and the risks

How to use your EpiPen

Blue to the sky, orange to the thigh

1. **Grip it in your fist**, orange tip down. Keep your thumb off both ends.
2. **Pull off the blue cap** straight up with your other hand. Don't bend or twist it.
3. **Aim at the outer thigh** from 10 cm. Through clothes is fine; avoid seams.
4. **Push in firmly** at a right angle until it clicks.
5. **Hold it there for 3 seconds.** Count slowly: 1, 2, 3.
6. **Remove it** and rub the spot for 10 seconds.

For a child, hold their leg still. Other brands (Jext, nasal spray) are used differently: follow the instructions for **your** device.

Straight after using it

1. **Call 999** and say “anaphylaxis”, even if you feel better.
2. **Lie down with legs raised.** Sit up only if breathing is hard. Do not stand or walk.
3. **Use the second pen after 5 minutes** if not better, or straight away if the first one fails.
4. **Don't stay alone.** Give used pens to the paramedics.

Use your pen, then call 999, if

- Throat or tongue swelling, hoarse voice
- Wheezing or struggling to breathe
- Feeling faint, pale and floppy, or collapse
- You are unsure: adrenaline is safe to give

Contact us the same day if

- You have used a pen and left hospital
- You have fewer than two in-date pens
- You have had a new allergic reaction
- You are not sure how to use your device

Risks and using it safely

Side effects like a racing heart, shaking or feeling anxious soon pass. Not using it is far riskier.

Injected a finger or hand by mistake? Go to A&E or call 111 straight away. Never inject the buttock, hands or feet.

Keep at room temperature, not in a fridge or hot car. The window liquid should be clear.

Check expiry dates, order new pens early and sign up for free expiry alerts.

Symptoms can return hours later, so you will be checked in hospital. We will refer you to an allergy clinic for tests and a written action plan.

Our GP by SRS Health Group
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Out of hours
NHS 24: call 111
Support: anaphylaxis.org.uk

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