

Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients about Anaphylaxis

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America estimates that 50 million people in the United States are affected by allergies. An allergy is the body's reaction to a foreign substance (allergen). This reaction can be as harmless as sneezing, itchy eyes, or a runny nose. In a severe case of an allergic reaction, or anaphylaxis, the body's response can be life-threatening, causing hives, low blood pressure, breathing problems, asthma, or death. There is no cure for allergies, only prevention and symptomatic treatment.¹ However, for many people that suffer from anaphylaxis when exposed to their allergic triggers, stronger treatments and protocols are necessary, as many times anaphylaxis is an unpredictable occurrence.

Anaphylaxis can happen after a person eats a food to which he or she is allergic, takes a medicine to which he or she is allergic, is stung by an insect to which he or she is allergic, or touches something to which he or she is allergic, like latex. Common symptoms of anaphylaxis are hives or swelling of the face, eye, ears, mouth, hands, or feet. Other common symptoms are itchy eyes, runny nose, swollen tongue, trouble breathing, vomiting or diarrhea, or feeling dizzy or passing out.² While many of these symptoms may sound benign, death associated with anaphylaxis occurs when the airway is obstructed due to swelling or when the blood pressure becomes too low to properly circulate blood in the body.³ If you experience any of the symptoms of anaphylaxis during an allergic episode, it is vital for you to get medical intervention, as you might be at risk for a potentially life-threatening attack.

Treatment for anaphylaxis is most effective when it is provided as early as possible; therefore, it is vitally important that you seek medical attention as soon as possible if you suspect an anaphylactic episode is occurring. The best treatment for an anaphylactic attack is an intramuscular injection of epinephrine, usually in the thigh. This medication is only available with a prescription from your healthcare provider, but emergency responders are able to administer this life-saving medication. Epinephrine is a natural chemical made by your body that works to combat anaphylaxis by causing your blood vessels to constrict, which increases blood pressure, while simultaneously causing your airway to open up. The earlier this medication is administered, the better your chance of successfully combating anaphylaxis. While awaiting medical intervention, it is best to remove the causative allergen immediately and note what caused the reaction. Anyone who experiences an anaphylactic episode is highly encouraged to visit the emergency room, as up to 20% of people who suffer from an episode have the symptoms resolved but then experience shock later without further exposure to the allergen.⁴

If you suffer from anaphylaxis often, seeking the help of an allergist is a great step to help determine potential causes of future or current episodes through allergen testing. After potential triggers have been identified, avoidance of these items is the best method to prevent another attack. However, if you are prone to these attacks, you may want to talk with your healthcare provider about a prescription for an epinephrine injection to help you manage oncoming attacks while waiting for medical attention.⁴ Another savvy tip would be to work with your provider to create a personalized, written, and regularly updated emergency action plan, which lists the possible symptoms of anaphylaxis as well as instructions on how to inject epinephrine using your prescribed injector. You may want to include the quickest route to the

nearest emergency room in your action plan. A copy of this plan should be placed at various places of living (home, work, school). A copy can also be kept in your car, purse, or wallet so that it is available at all times. In addition, those who suffer from anaphylactic episodes should consider investing in medical identification bands that denote their allergic triggers in case they are unresponsive when medical help arrives.⁵ Though anaphylaxis is a potentially life-threatening condition, allergies can be managed and controlled through proper education and conversations with your healthcare providers and pharmacists.

References:

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