

ITCHY EYES HEADACHES STOMACH CRAMPS SNEEZING DO YOU HAVE ALLERGIES?

- **What Are Allergies?**

Allergies are a result of the body's increased sensitivity to common substances in the environment. These substances are called **allergens**. Allergens cause reactions when entering the body through the skin, by inhalation or by ingestion. Wind blown pollens from grasses, weeds, trees, mold, animal hair, house dust and foods are all examples of allergens.

When an allergic person is exposed to an allergen, the immune system produces an antibody, called Immunoglobulin E (IgE). It is the production of this antibody that eventually causes allergy symptoms; sneezing, runny nose, headaches, stomach cramps, joint pain and others.

- **When Do Allergies Appear?**

This depends on the cause of the allergy problems. If it is an allergy due to pollen, you should see more symptoms when the plant causing the irritation releases its pollen. If you have a problem with indoor substances, such as house dust or food related allergies, you are more likely to exhibit year round symptoms.

- **How Can I Have My Allergies Diagnosed?**

A small sample of blood is drawn for diagnostic evaluation in the laboratory. The test is quick, convenient, inexpensive, safe and accurate. The test measures the level of circulating IgE antibody in the blood for each specific allergen tested. The greater the IgE level, the greater the sensitivity and allergic reaction will be.

- **Why Do I Have Allergies?**

Although the tendency to have allergies is inherited, the specific substances you are allergic to is not necessarily inherited. If one parent has allergies, the chances of you also having them are as high as 50%. If both parents have allergies, the chances of you having some allergies can be as high as 100%.

- **Treatment**

All treatment for allergies should be done in consultation with your physician. The best form of treatment for allergies is **avoidance or elimination of the offending allergen**. If avoidance is not possible or does not control your symptoms, your physician may recommend over-the-counter or prescribed nasal sprays, decongestants or anti-histamines. These may help clear up some of the symptoms attributable to airborne allergens.

- **Is The Blood Test As Accurate As The Skin Scratch/Prick Method?**

Yes. The blood serum test is a reliable, safe, relatively painless and less expensive method than is the skin scratch/prick test. With the skin test you are directly injected with the allergen tested either just on or just below the surface of the skin. The physician will judge the degree of sensitivity based on a visual exam for any form of reaction such as redness, puss or swelling known as the Wheal/Flare reaction. The blood serum test detects and measures the level of antibodies in one's blood using sophisticated diagnostic testing procedures and equipment in a laboratory environment.

- **What is the difference between allergy and sensitivity?**

A true allergy is evidenced by the presence of a specific IgE antibody in the blood. Often time people experience allergy-like symptoms yet there is no evidence of the antibody in their blood. In these cases the person may have a high sensitivity to the substance they came in contact with but not necessarily an allergy. In these cases the symptoms of sensitivity may dissipate much faster than a true allergy and the reaction may not be as severe. This occurs frequently with reactions to animals.

COUGHING HIVES RUNNY NOSE NAUSEA *EARACHE*

HOW DO I INTERPRET MY ALLERGY TEST RESULTS?

The *in-vitro* (blood draw) Allergy test measures the level of circulating **IgE** antibody in your blood to specific allergens that were tested from various groups of substances i.e. trees, grasses, weeds, molds, animal dander and foods. The level of antibody to each specific allergen is expressed in numbers ranging from 0 to 5, with 0 being the least amount of antibody and 5 being the highest.

As a general rule, the higher the number, the higher the level of circulating antibody to the specific allergen tested was found in your bloodstream. If you have not been recently exposed to, or ingested a particular allergen that you previously tested positive to or suspect you are allergic to, you may have little or no circulating antibody to that substance in your bloodstream at the present time.

Test Result Levels

0	Negative Response	3	Moderate Level
1	Equivocal/Low Level	4	High Level
2	Mild Level	5	Very High Level

You should keep in mind the following information when interpreting the results:

1. A negative result indicates no circulating levels of antibody to a particular allergen at the point in time at which you had the test. This does not preclude previous exposure (and sensitivity), which could resurface if you were not exposed to the allergen at the time of your test. Likewise, one could develop sensitivity over time to an allergen you may not have previously been exposed to.
2. Allergy symptoms are usually caused by being exposed to a number of allergens that you are allergic to. This phenomenon known as the “**threshold effect**” is important in interpreting your results. Limiting one’s exposure to those allergens which can be avoided is often enough to lower the threshold and negate the effect of those particular allergens. Some people have a higher threshold than others and can be allergy symptoms free yet have higher test level scores. This is another way of saying that everyone has a different tolerance level to the same allergen.
3. Allergy symptoms are the result of being exposed to substances that your immune system cannot tolerate and therefore produces quantities of antibody to combat these substances. The more you are exposed to these substances or the lower your tolerance to them the immune system will produce more antibody. It is the production of these antibodies that causes the release of histamines in the blood that actually produces the different allergy symptoms. Examples of allergy symptoms are the following:

Itchy Eyes	Headaches	Fatigue	Sore Throat
Sneezing	Coughing	Hives	Redness of the Skin
Nausea	Earaches	Bloating	Runny Nose
Joint Pain	Cramps	Itchy Skin	

Please remember it is important to always consult your physician when interpreting medical test results and formulating a course of action if you have positive test results.