



How Allergies Are Diagnosed

Many allergy symptoms are easily recognizable (e.g., sneezing, a runny nose, watery eyes) after exposure to certain triggers such as visiting the home of someone with pets or spending time outdoors during peak seasons. However, allergies don't always present themselves so clearly. Many chronic symptoms are easy to overlook or misunderstood for other causes. Self-diagnosis of allergy may lead to unnecessary avoidance of foods, medications, or certain environments, however, appropriate allergy testing can help to identify possible food, drug, or insect venom allergies.

Step One- Physical Exam:

Your doctor will begin by taking a complete clinical history, which involves asking a series of questions. Your answers to these questions will help your doctor gain insight as to the severity of your allergic symptoms.

Some examples of questions you may be asked are:

- What type of symptoms do you have?
- How long have you had these symptoms?
- When do you experience these symptoms- seasonally or year-round? During the day or at night? Indoors or outdoors? At home or at work?
- Is there any history of allergies in your family?
- Do you have any other health conditions?

If the physical exam and clinical history indicate that you may suffer from allergies, your doctor will perform an allergy skin test to identify the specific cause of your allergies.

Step Two- Skin Prick & Intradermal Testing:

Skin tests are performed in your doctor's office and typically take an hour or so. A member of your doctor's medical staff will press small amounts of allergen into the very top layer of skin with a plastic device. This takes seconds to apply and is typically done on the upper part of the back. The number of tests may vary, but typically range from 40-60 different allergens. These allergens match common pollens, animals and environmental exposures found in your region of the country.

In addition to testing to allergens, there will be two control tests- a positive control and a negative control. The positive control shows your allergic response is functioning properly, while the negative control ensures that reactions are truly due to allergy, and not skin sensitivity.

Once the tests are applied, the staff member will wait 15-20 minutes to give your skin time to demonstrate your reaction. Reactions look and feel very similar to a typical mosquito bite- a small raised circle surrounded by redness. This is referred to as a

“wheal and flare” and typically go away within an hour, although some may linger for up to 24 hours. If you have any concerns about your test results, contact your physician.

Some allergy specialists may elect to perform a second round of testing called intradermal testing in order to get an even clearer picture of severity of your allergy to any specific allergen. Intradermal testing involves injecting a small amount of allergen under the skin, usually on the upper arm.

Step 3- Discuss Results & Options:

Once your skin testing is completed, your doctor will review the test results and explain your options. You will then work with your doctor to develop a treatment plan that may include a combination of avoidance, symptomatic and/or preventative medications, & allergen specific immunotherapy.

Preparing For Allergy Skin Tests

There are a few things that may interfere with the success of your allergy test:

- It is recommended that you avoid placing creams on the skin the day of testing unless directed by the health care provider.
- **If you are taking antihistamines (Example: Claritin, Zyrtec, etc.) or heartburn medications (Zantac and Ranitidine) they MUST be stopped 7 days prior to testing. Please note that this is not a complete list. If you are unsure whether your medication should be discontinued, please contact our office.** You may take Benadryl, as directed, for treatment of allergy symptoms up until 3 days prior to testing.

NOTE: Failure to discontinue these medicines could cause your results to be inaccurate, therefore requiring the test to be rescheduled.

- Oral, nasal or inhaled medications **do not** need to be stopped as they do not affect testing results.
- Anti-leukotrienes (Example: Singulair, Accolate, etc.) **do not** need to be stopped as they do not affect testing results.
- On the day of your testing appointment, if you are sick (i.e., feverish) or if your allergy symptoms are particularly severe, contact our office.

Please visit our website, www.AdvancedENTandAllergy.com for a complete list of medications to avoid prior to testing.