

## **ANAPHYLAXIS: THE FATAL ALLERGIC REACTION**



Anaphylaxis is the life-threatening form of allergic reaction. It is sudden, violent and frightening. It may begin with severe itching of the eyes or face, then other symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, and difficulty with breathing may develop. If the reaction is not stopped at this point, the symptoms may become more severe, leading to a drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness and even death.

The frequency of fatal and near-fatal “anaphylactic reactions” has risen over the past several years and is likely to continue to rise. This has been especially true of food induced anaphylactic reactions. Recent studies estimate that, in Canada, about one person in 100 is at-risk and there may be as many as 50 deaths a year; that’s about one a week.

### **BE A SURVIVOR! FOLLOW THE THREE “A’S” OF ANAPHYLAXIS!**

#### **AWARENESS**

#### **AVOIDANCE**

#### **ACTION**

### **AWARENESS**

Be aware that you may have the problem if you have ever had a sudden severe allergic reaction. Be aware of precisely the cause of your anaphylaxis. Is it food, insect stings, medications, or exercise? You will need an allergist to make the diagnosis.

Be aware that every situation may put you into contact with your allergen. Each contact with your allergen may be a life-threatening one. Be very cautious and alert to the danger.

### **AVOIDANCE**

Once you know what your trigger is, be extremely careful to avoid it. You can never take anything for granted.

Keep those foods which would cause anaphylaxis out of the house. The foods and additives most likely to cause anaphylaxis are: peanuts, nuts, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk and sulfites. Before eating any food, double-check that it does not contain your allergen because food ingredients can change in any prepared food. Be vigilant and assertive when eating away from home to ensure that you do not eat a food containing your allergen.

Insect stings are dangerous for some, so if this is your allergen, be careful where you sit or walk barefoot. Inform any doctor treating you if you are allergic to medications. If your trigger is exercise-induced, stop at the first sign of a reaction.

## **ACTION**

Despite all your awareness and careful avoidance, there is still a chance of unavoidable exposure to your allergen. The time between exposure to the allergen and death can be as short as ten minutes.

## **CARRY YOUR EMERGENCY KIT WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU KNOW YOU MAY BE EXPOSED TO YOUR ALLERGEN!**

You and your allergist should develop an action plan such as the following:

If you believe that you have been exposed to your allergen:

1. If medications or injection of adrenalin/epinephrine have been advised, always know how to use all the medications prescribed for an anaphylactic reaction. Your doctor or pharmacist will assist you.
2. These medications and injection comprise your emergency kit. Always have your emergency kit within reach and on your person. You may not have time to go for it.
3. Do not underestimate your allergic reaction by wasting time. After you have self-administered adrenalin/epinephrine, go to the nearest hospital's Emergency Department.
4. If your symptoms return or worsen on the way to hospital, adrenalin can be administered every 15 minutes. If you will be more than 15-30 minutes from a hospital, carry an injection for every 15 minutes. So, if your hospital is 1 hour away, you would need three injections.

Be aware that in most jurisdictions, ambulances do not carry adrenalin nor are the personnel allowed to administer it.

5. Limit your physical effort, obtain help and do not overexert yourself.

## **WE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL A WHOLE LOT BETTER**

**Understanding is the key to allergy and asthma management. As an AAIA member, you'll be taking an important step toward a healthier, symptom-free life.**

---

### **For more information:**

Allergy/ Asthma Information Association (AAIA)  
Box 100, Toronto, Ontario M9W 5K9 (effective Nov 1/00)  
Phone (416) 679-9521 or 1-800-611-7011 Fax: (416) 679-9524  
Email: national@aaia.ca Web site: [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca)

Calgary Allergy Network (403) 257-3173 Web site: [www.calgaryallergy.ca](http://www.calgaryallergy.ca)  
Anaphylactic Support Group of Alberta (Edmonton) (403) 461-5237

*This article is courtesy of the Calgary Allergy Network at [www.calgaryallergy.ca](http://www.calgaryallergy.ca) and the Allergy/Asthma Information Association (AAIA) at [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca). May be reproduced for educational purposes on a non-profit basis only.*