

Suspected Extreme Allergic Reaction (Anaphylaxis)

Patient Information

Department of Acute Medicine

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Introduction

Anaphylaxis is an extreme form of allergic reaction. Typically, it occurs very suddenly and without warning. The symptoms get rapidly worse and, without treatment, can cause death.

Signs and symptoms

Classic early symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Wheezing and hoarseness. This happens as the airways narrow.
- Swelling of the lips, tongue and throat (angio-oedema). Whilst it can occur anywhere, swelling here can completely block the airway, meaning air (and therefore oxygen) cannot be breathed into the lungs. Without emergency treatment, this results in asphyxiation (suffocation).
- An itchy rash, known as Urticaria, commonly called hives. The rash is raised and generally pale pink in colour. The raised areas are called wheals. Not everyone having an anaphylactic reaction gets this rash.

Other symptoms include:

- Feeling faint, due to dropping of blood pressure.
- A sense of impending doom.
- A fast heart rate (tachycardia) or palpitations as the heart tries to pump faster to maintain the blood pressure.
- Symptoms involving the gastrointestinal tract (the gut), including nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

Classic advancing symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Stridor, a noise created by trying to breathe in when the upper airways (namely, the mouth, throat and windpipe or trachea) are obstructed due to swelling.
- Respiratory collapse meaning that the breathing system of the body is failing. There might be fast, shallow breathing and the skin of the lips and tongue may become bluish (called cyanosis). If you cannot breathe air into the lungs, the blood cannot be oxygenated. Oxygenated blood is needed so that the cells in our body, and therefore the organs in our body, can work. It is vitally important that the brain should not be starved of oxygen. The heart muscle needs oxygen so it can pump the blood around the body. Once one major organ system of the body starts to falter, in turn the others become strained until they are also unable to function. This can result in death.
- Confusion, agitation and anxiety soon follow. Low oxygen levels (hypoxia) can cause confusion. If you are unable to breathe properly due to angio-oedema, you will feel restless and anxious. Eventually, loss of consciousness occurs.
- Low blood pressure (hypotension) and eventual circulatory collapse are the end events.

Biphasic reaction

Sometimes a second wave of reactions can develop. This can happen in up to a third of patients and is the reason that you may be admitted for observation for 6 to 12 hours.

What to do in the event of an anaphylactic reaction

- Use your adrenaline auto-injector pen intra-muscularly (see below) from both hospital doctor and GP's prescription
- **Call 999**

Triggers

It is best to avoid anything that may have caused the reaction. Your Doctor (both hospital and GP) can give further advice on this.

Referral process

You have been referred to a Specialist Allergy Service, led by Dr Archana Herwadkar (Consultant Immunologist) at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Hospital. You should shortly receive a letter confirming your appointment for the Outpatient Clinic.

Using your adrenaline injector pen

- Remember to have your adrenaline injector pen available at all times, regularly check the expiry date and register with the free Expiry Alert Service.
- Pull off the blue safety release cap at the end.
- Hold the pen and firmly push the orange tip against the outer thigh. Note the injection can be given through thin clothing, such as trousers, skirts or tights.
- The "injection" will be fired automatically into the thigh muscle.
- Hold the orange tip against the thigh for 10 seconds.
- As soon as you release pressure, a protective cover will extend over the needle tip.
- Make sure that you tell the Paramedics that an adrenaline pen has been given.
- Remember that the adrenaline injector can only be used once.

For more information, please contact

Allergy UK Helpline: 01322 619864
Website: www.allergyuk.org

Anaphylaxis Campaign Helpline: 01252 542029
Website: www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

MedicAlert Freephone: 0800 581420
Website: www.medicalert.co.uk

Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary
Wigan Lane
Wigan WN1 2NN

Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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Call 111 first when it's less urgent than 999.



Phone: 0808 802 1212
Text: 81212
www.veteransgateway.org.uk

