

Getting the most out of a GP appointment for allergies



An allergy diagnosis isn't just a label, it's the key to managing symptoms, preventing severe reactions and starting to live a life with allergies well. The earlier you recognise the signs and seek diagnosis, the better you can manage symptoms, avoid complications and take control of the condition.

Whether it is identifying a food trigger or an environmental allergy, for yourself or for your child, a diagnosis opens the door to accessing the appropriate treatment pathways. Promptly treating allergies in infancy can also increase the possibilities of allergies being outgrown, and can avoid allergies getting any worse.



Prepare

Your first interaction with a healthcare professional when seeking a diagnosis for a suspected allergy, whether for yourself or your child, will likely be with your family GP.

GPs are the first line of care for most health conditions, so they have a broad knowledge across various areas. However, they may not specialise in every condition, including allergies. That's why it's important to approach your appointment well-prepared. Gathering information about your symptoms, being ready to answer questions the GP may have, and knowing the right questions to ask, can help both you and your GP identify the most likely cause of your symptoms. This preparation can also guide your GP in providing the right first-line treatment or in referring you to a specialist for further assessment and care.

Booking your appointment

There are some GPs that do have an invested interest in allergy and may have undergone additional allergy training. So when booking your appointment, it's always worth asking if the surgery has a GP with a specialist knowledge in allergy, and asking to see them if possible. But remember, appointments are only typically less than 10 minutes long, so it's still really important to prepare to get the most out of the appointment.

Bring to your appointment

- ❑ Photos of any visible symptoms
- ❑ A symptoms diary or a note of:
 - ❑ Suspected food/allergen trigger
 - ❑ If you have eaten this food or been exposed to this allergen before
 - ❑ The symptoms you experienced
 - ❑ How soon symptoms appeared and how long they lasted
 - ❑ Any medication taken to reduce symptoms
 - ❑ If food allergy is suspected: Was the food was cooked, preserved etc. note down the full ingredients list from the food packaging
 - ❑ If you went to A&E or another healthcare service
 - ❑ If you were already unwell at the time
 - ❑ If there were any other factors involved e.g. happened whilst exercising

Keeping a symptoms diary for you

As soon as you begin to recognise persistent symptoms that could be allergy, it's a good idea to begin keeping a symptoms diary. This is a written account of the symptoms you're experiencing, and things that may be triggering or influencing these symptoms. Things to notice are, the time of day, foods, products you are using, environment, activity, medication etc. This diary is the key to identifying the trigger of your symptoms and will help your GP give a diagnosis or refer you to the right specialist care for a more diagnosis. Seeing a specialist is particularly important when the trigger is not clear or symptoms continue when the suspected trigger has been avoided.

[Click here to download our Food Symptoms Dairy resource.](#)

This resource can be adapted to also track non-food allergy symptoms.

Things to include

- ❑ Suspected food/allergen trigger
- ❑ If you have eaten this food or been exposed to this allergen before
- ❑ The symptoms you experienced
- ❑ How soon symptoms appeared and how long they lasted
- ❑ Any medication taken to reduce symptoms
- ❑ If food allergy is suspected: Was the food was cooked, preserved etc, note down the full ingredients list from the food packaging
- ❑ If you went to A&E or another healthcare service
- ❑ If you were already unwell at the time
- ❑ If there were any other factors involved e.g. happened whilst exercising

Keeping a symptoms diary for baby

Recognising food allergy in a baby who's weaning can be a frightening, confusing and challenging time. This is why we have developed a Weaning Dairy, to help parents and carers of babies track and reference foods their child has tried and if a reaction occurred. The diary is part of our Weaning Support Pack. [Download here.](#)

If you have a baby that you suspect might be showing symptoms of food allergy, always visit your GP for medical help and advice without delay.

Ask

Never be afraid to ask questions, especially when it comes to yours or your child's health. GPs want you to leave the appointment with the knowledge and reassurance that you are on the right path to seeking the right diagnosis and treatment for your condition. They welcome your questions and are there to provide the answers and solutions to your concerns.

At your appointment, ASK:

- ❑ if your symptoms could be related to an allergy
- ❑ about the most appropriate tests for your situation
- ❑ for advice on identifying your allergen triggers and ways to reduce exposure at home, work, school etc.
- ❑ if there are any medications or lifestyle changes that can help manage your symptoms
- ❑ how frequently you should check in or follow up with your GP regarding your symptoms
- ❑ what will happen next. If tests will be booked or a referral made, how long will you need to wait and where will they take place
- ❑ if a referral is made, is there anything you need to do in preparation for the initial consultation e.g. keep a symptoms diary

Listen and leave confidently

It can be really overwhelming receiving a lot of information, very quickly, about a new health condition. Allergy can also be very complex at times. So while it's important to listen carefully during your appointment, actually absorbing everything in the moment can be really tough.

Here are some tips to help you leave your appointment feeling informed, empowered and confident that you are one step closer to taking control of your condition.

Things to try

- ❑ If something doesn't make sense, always ask for it to be explained again, maybe in a different way
- ❑ If you're still not confident that you completely understand, try repeating it back to your GP for clarification
- ❑ Take a note book to jot down any important information
- ❑ Ask if there are any leaflets or print outs that you can take with you
- ❑ Ask if they can text or email you important information e.g. medication names, links to resources and support websites