

# Allergies



Allergic disorders are very common in Australia with approximately 4.1 million Australians<sup>1</sup> having at least one allergy. There are many different types of allergies, presenting with a variety of symptoms. Fortunately, diagnosis and treatment options are available for most allergies.

## What is an allergy?

An allergy is an overreaction of a person's immune system to substances that are harmless for most people. These substances are known as allergens and can cause a variety of symptoms.

Common sources of allergens include:

- **Animal dander:**  
Such as the hair and secretions of pets like cats and dogs.
- **Food:**  
Such as eggs, fish, crustaceans, peanuts, tree nuts (for example, almonds, cashews, pecans and walnuts), milk, soy and sesame products.
- **Arthropods:**  
Such as house dust mites, and the venom from bees and wasps.
- **Medicines:**  
Including prescription drugs (such as penicillin), over-the-counter medicines (such as aspirin) and herbal preparations.
- **Moulds:**  
Such as mildew and mould spores.
- **Plants:**  
Pollen from grasses, weeds and trees.



## What are symptoms of an allergy?

The most common allergic conditions are hay fever (allergic rhinitis/conjunctivitis), eczema, food allergies and asthma<sup>1</sup>. Allergies can cause a variety of symptoms, including:

Abdominal	Cramping, vomiting and diarrhea after eating certain foods
Anaphylaxis	A potentially life threatening allergic reaction of rapid onset
Eyes	Itching, redness, swelling, tearing, watery eyes
Lungs	Asthmatic symptoms such as shortness of breath, wheezing, tightness in the chest, coughing
Nose	Itching, congestion, sneezing, postnasal drip
Skin	Hives or itchy welts, itching or eczema

1. The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, (2007). The Economic Impact of Allergic Disease in Australia: Not to Be Sneezed At [online]. Available: <http://www.allergy.org.au/content/view/327/274> [accessed June 2010]

## Where can I go for an allergy test?

Allergy testing is performed at selected Western Diagnostic Pathology collection centres. Please visit [www.wdp.com.au](http://www.wdp.com.au) or contact your nearest laboratory for more information:

Albany	Ph: (08) 9841 6211
Busselton	Ph: (08) 9752 2452
Hollywood Hospital	Ph: (08) 9346 7101
Joondalup	Ph: (08) 9400 9819
Kalgoorlie	Ph: (08) 9021 4833
Mount Hospital	Ph: (08) 9481 1822
Myaree	Ph: (08) 9317 0999
Peel Health Campus	Ph: (08) 9531 8510
Darwin	Ph: (08) 8901 7900
Alice Springs	Ph: (08) 8952 6633

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## Do allergy tests attract a Medicare rebate?

You may be eligible to receive a Medicare rebate for up to four tests per year, subject to Medicare guidelines and criteria. Western Diagnostic Pathology offers testing for up to four allergens or allergen mixes each time. If your doctor wishes to test for additional allergens, please contact our Head of Immunology, on 08 9317 0999.



## What happens next?

While there is not yet a cure for allergic disease, minimising exposure to allergens, managing symptoms with medications, and allergen immunotherapy (desensitisation) are methods that can be useful in controlling allergic symptoms.

Once the allergy triggers are identified, your doctor can help you establish a treatment plan, including recognising symptoms of an allergic reaction and how to treat them.

**For further information, please speak  
with your doctor or visit:**

**Anaphylaxis Australia:  
[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)**

**Australasian Society of Clinical  
Immunology and Allergy (ASCI):  
[www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)**



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