

Ask the Doctor



What causes allergies?

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

Have you ever sneezed a lot, got itchy skin, swollen lips, or watery eyes after eating certain foods or touching something?

These reactions may be caused by allergies. Allergies are common in children and adults, and it is important for pupils to understand what they are and how they affect the body.

An allergy happens when your body reacts strongly to something that is usually harmless. This reaction comes from the immune system, which is the part of the body that protects us from sickness. Sometimes, the immune system makes a mistake and attacks things that are not dangerous. When this happens, it causes allergy symptoms.

What happens inside the body?

Dr Henry Ssekyanzi, a general physician, explains what happens when a person gets an allergy.

"When you come into contact with the things that trigger your allergies, your body's reaction can inflame the skin, sinuses, airways or digestive system."

This means the body becomes irritated inside or outside, leading to different signs and feelings that show something is wrong.

Causes of allergies

1. Allergies can be caused by many different things. Some children are allergic to certain foods like eggs, milk, groundnuts, fish, or fruits. Others may react to some medicines given when they are sick.
2. Allergies can also be caused by touching certain chemicals such as soaps, detergents, or lotions. Some children get allergies from pollen in the air, bee stings, or flakes of skin and hair from poultry and animals like cats, dogs, and goats.

Different people, different reactions

Not everyone reacts the same way to allergies. Dr Ssekyanzi explains that some children may only get mild itching or sneezing, while others may become very sick.

"Different people have different allergies and the severity varies from person to person and can range from minor irritation to severe, which is a life-threatening emergency. While most allergies cannot be cured, treatments can help relieve your allergy symptoms."

Common allergy symptoms

Allergy symptoms can appear in many ways. Some people sneeze a lot or get a runny nose. Others may have swollen lips, itchy skin, eczema, or hives. Eyes may start to water, and some people get a sore throat or stomach upset. Wheezing when breathing and swollen eyes are also common signs. With care, treatment, and quick action, children with allergies can live healthy and happy lives.

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