

# UNDERSTANDING ANAPHYLAXIS

## WHAT IS ANAPHYLAXIS?

(PRONOUNCED ANA-FILL-AXIS)

- Anaphylaxis, also known as anaphylactic shock, is a severe and potentially fatal allergic reaction.
- It affects the whole body.
- Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical treatment.

Although there are many causes for this type of severe allergic reaction, the most common cause is eating a food to which the person is allergic to. Even eating a tiny amount of a particular food can cause anaphylactic shock.

An anaphylactic reaction can occur suddenly within seconds or even up to an hour to develop.

People can also have serious allergic reactions through skin contact (i.e. latex), medications (including over the counter pain killers), stings (i.e. bees & wasps) or by touching the mouth with contaminated hands, utensils, toys etc.

## SYMPTOMS

Although there is a wide range of symptoms that occur with anaphylaxis, not all of them will be experienced on each occasion. The symptoms can vary in severity and speed with which they happen even in the same person.

Symptoms Include:

- Rash / hives anywhere on the body
- Swelling of lips, mouth, face or throat
- Difficulty breathing, swallowing or speaking
- Abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- Sudden feeling of weakness (drop in blood pressure)
- Collapse and unconsciousness
- Alteration in heart rate

## COMMON CAUSES OF ANAPHYLAXIS

Allergies can be caused by lots of different things. These are known as allergens.

The following is a list of common allergens.

Peanuts	Tree nuts	Sesame
Fish	Shellfish	Dairy products
Eggs	Soya	Latex
Bee sting	Fruit	Penicillin & other drugs

## TREATMENT

- Anaphylaxis requires emergency treatment.
- Lie the person flat and elevate the feet, unless this makes breathlessness worse.
- An adrenaline injection (Anapen / EpiPen) prescribed by a doctor should be used promptly, as directed, at the first sign of swelling in the mouth or throat, breathlessness or weakness. This should relieve breathing problems, raise blood pressure and reduce swelling.
- An ambulance must be called immediately.
- If there is no improvement or symptoms get worse a second adrenaline injection can be given after 5-10 minutes.
- Less serious reactions (such as rash) can be treated with antihistamine.

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK?

When a person comes into contact with their allergen. It can cause a number of different chemicals to be released in their body which can have an effect on their organs.

During anaphylactic shock the blood vessels leak, bronchial tissues swell and blood pressure drops. This can cause the person to choke and collapse.

## YOU CAN HELP ANAPHYLAXIS SUFFERERS BY-

- Taking allergies seriously.
- Reducing the risk of anaphylaxis by washing your hands after eating.
- Ensuring work-surfaces and utensils are cleaned with soapy water after use.
- Removing the food the person is allergic to in order to avoid accidental exposure and reaction.
- Avoiding cross-contaminating food (i.e. using the same knife for the butter after using it in the peanut butter. This would contaminate the butter and would be unsafe for a person with a nut allergy to use.)
- Taking the time to familiarise yourself with the persons allergies, medication and emergency plan.
- Do not stigmatise or exclude a person because of their allergies.
- If an allergic person you know shows signs of a serious allergic reaction, act immediately. Get them medical assistance without delay – you could save their life!

**Anaphylaxis is a condition that can be managed with understanding and co-operation!**

**Show You Care**

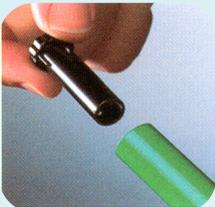
**Be Allergy Aware**

## THE ANAPEN

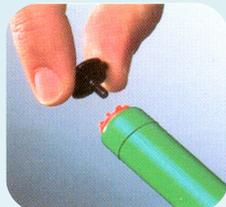
Below are instructions on how to administer the Anapen (adrenaline injection) in an emergency situation.

A person who has been prescribed an Anapen should carry it with them at all times.

**It is advisable to seek correct training in the use of the Anapen.**



**1. Remove the black needle cap.**



**2. Remove the black safety cap from the red firing button.**



**3. Hold Anapen against the outer thigh and press the red firing button.**



**4. Hold Anapen in position for 10 seconds, then remove the Anapen and gently massage the injected site.**

## USEFUL WEBSITE ADDRESSES

[www.irishanaphylaxis.org](http://www.irishanaphylaxis.org)

[www.allergyni.co.uk](http://www.allergyni.co.uk)

[www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk)

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