

Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction, which involves many different parts of the body and can be potentially fatal. Symptoms occur within minutes to a few hours after exposure to the allergy causing trigger, which may be inhaled, eaten, or injected into the body. In some instances it is not easy to identify the trigger for the allergy reaction.

The most common causes of severe reactions can be foods, medications, latex (rubber) contact, or an insect bite by a venomous insect such as a honey bee or wasp. During Summer, insect stings are common. If you are known to have a stinging insect allergy, try to avoid exposure to them. Stay away from garbage cans, don't go bare foot, and avoid attracting them by not using perfumes and colorful clothing (don't look and smell like a flower).

The most common symptoms that the person experiences involve the skin, such as hives, diffuse redness or rashes all over the body. These may be associated with swelling of the face, lips, tongue and throat, leading to breathing difficulty. If the person has underlying asthma, this may be exacerbated. There may be stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, or even diarrhea. As the symptoms progress, there may be dizziness, a drop in blood pressure, and collapse.

The person, who experiences these reactions, has generally been exposed to the sensitizing agent in the past. Repeat exposure to the same agent causes the reaction. It is important to recognize the symptoms, react fast, start treatment, review the incident, and take measures to prevent it from happening again. It is also advisable to wear a medical alert bracelet.

Treatment

The first drug of choice is Epinephrine which is available in various easy to administer kits. This should be administered right away. Follow this with an appropriate dose of Benadryl (preferably liquid) as it works faster. If an insect Sting is suspected, tying a tourniquet above the sting site helps to slow down the absorption of the venom. The next step is to seek medical help. Depending on the progression of symptoms, 911 should be called or the person should be taken to the Emergency Department.

Resources:

The following links provide excellent information:

Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology - (www.aaaai.org)

Food and Allergy Network - (www.faan.org)