

Latex Allergy

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Latex is derived from the milky sap of the rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*. Latex allergy develops after some episode of sensitization with latex. The most common source is rubber gloves. Some individuals are at increased risk of developing latex allergy. They include individuals with myelodysplasia (bone marrow failure), congenital urologic abnormalities, patients who have undergone multiple surgical procedures or intermittent catheterizations, patients with asthma and eczema or food allergies. It is estimated that 5-10% of healthcare workers have latex allergy.

Some individuals with allergies to certain foods are at increased risk of developing latex allergy. These foods can trigger latex-like allergic reaction because the proteins in them can mimic latex protein as they break down in the body.

There are several types of latex reactions. Irritant contact dermatitis is the least threatening type of reaction. It is a non-allergic reaction resulting in dryness, itching, burning, scaling and lesions of the skin.

Allergic contact dermatitis is a delayed reaction to additives used in the latex processing. Symptoms are the same as irritant contact dermatitis but the reactions tend to last longer, are less localized (spread to more parts of the body) and are more intense.

Immediate allergic reaction (latex hyper-sensitivity) is the most serious reaction to latex. It can appear as rhinitis with hayfever-like symptoms, conjunctivitis (pink eye), cramps, hives and severe itching. Very rarely breathing difficulty and hypotension can occur requiring emergency room care.

Diagnosis is determined by the patient's history, a positive skin test to latex and a positive blood test. The treatment consists of removal of offending latex products and drug treatment according to the type of symptoms. The individual should wear a Medic Alert bracelet and carry an emergency epinephrine syringe. There is no cure, only prevention. Please notify your doctor or dentist 24 hours prior to an appointment about your allergy to latex. Usually the hospital or doctor will have a latex-free protocol for patients with latex allergy.

REFERENCES: ALLERGY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE, VOLUME 2. 1073-1078

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