Latex Allergy

Latex is a milky sap that comes from the rubber tree. Natural latex rubber is a product manufactured from the sap. Many items used in homes and hospitals contain latex. Latex allergy is a reaction to a protein in latex. It is not known how much exposure to this protein causes a person to develop a latex allergy.

Signs of Latex Allergy

People sensitive to latex can develop signs minutes after exposure. Signs range from mild to severe and include:

- Skin rash
- Hives – raised, often itchy, red welts on the skin
- Flushing – redness in the face or other areas of the body
- Itching
- Nasal, eye or sinus symptoms
- Asthma
- Anaphylactic shock (in rare cases)

Treatment

It is important to find signs early. See your doctor as soon as you have any signs. The best way to protect yourself is to stay away from latex products as much as you can. Since there is no cure for latex allergy, the goal is to relieve your signs.
If you have a latex allergy, follow these precautions:

- Avoid contact with latex gloves and products.
- Avoid areas where you may inhale the powder from latex gloves worn by others.
- Tell your employer, coworkers and health care providers that you have a latex allergy.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet.
- Carry or have available an epinephrine self-injection kit. This medicine helps stop signs of severe latex allergy.

Products that Contain Latex

Many products found in the home and at work contain latex. The below lists of items to avoid are only guides. Be sure to read labels on products and prepackaged foods.

Common Latex Products to Avoid:

- Balloons
- Balls
- Baby bottle nipples
- Carpet backing
- Condoms
- Diapers
- Diaphragm
- Dishwashing gloves
- Erasers
- Handles on racquets, tools, bikes
- Pacifiers
- Rubber bands
- Shoe soles
- Waistbands and elastic on clothing, underwear and socks
- Water toys and equipment

There are many medical supplies which contain latex such as band-aids, blood pressure cuffs, tubing and syringes. There are latex-free alternatives. Talk to your health care providers, pharmacist and/or employer.
**Common Foods to Avoid:**
Some foods have proteins that look like latex proteins. Sometimes the body cannot tell the difference between these proteins.

- Avocado
- Banana
- Celery
- Cherry
- Chestnuts
- Fig
- Grape
- Hazelnuts
- Kiwi
- Melon
- Nectarine
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pineapple
- Plum
- Potato
- Rye
- Strawberry
- Tomato
- Wheat
- Plum
- Potato
- Rye
- Strawberry
- Tomato
- Wheat

Talk to your doctor if you have signs of an allergy after eating any of these foods. It may not mean that you have a latex allergy. Also, if you have a latex allergy, it does not mean you should avoid all of these foods. Ask about getting tested for food allergies.

**Anaphylactic Shock**
Anaphylactic Shock is a widespread and very serious allergic reaction. Signs include:

- Dizziness
- Loss of consciousness
- Problems breathing
- Swelling of the tongue and breathing tubes
- Blueness of the skin
- Low blood pressure
- Heart failure
- Death

**Epinephrine Injection:**
Immediate medical treatment is needed for anaphylactic shock.
Epinephrine is the only medicine that can help you if this occurs.

If you blow up a latex balloon and your lips swell up and itch, there is no need for epinephrine. However, if you have trouble breathing, your voice changes or you feel your throat swelling, take epinephrine right away. These signs indicate that the reaction involves your airways. If the reaction continues, it may quickly block your ability to breathe.
To be effective, epinephrine must be given by injection within minutes after the first sign of an allergic reaction. Epinephrine comes in pre-measured, self-injectable containers and is sold under the brand names Epipen, Epipen Jr, Twinject, Adrenalin Chloride and Adrenalin.

There are three things to remember about epinephrine:

- The sooner the medicine is injected, the better your chances of stopping the anaphylactic reaction.

- It is better to be safe than sorry. Taking epinephrine when it is not needed will not cause serious problems.

- Epinephrine provides only temporary relief. Immediately after injecting the medicine, have someone take you to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Your doctor or nurse will teach you about when and how to use your epinephrine. Epinephrine should be taken any time symptoms show that important organs, such as the heart, throat or lungs are affected.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.