

# KNOW WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF SEVERE FOOD REACTION

Do you know someone who has a food allergy? It might be a friend, your child's classmate, someone at work, or even a family member. If you do, there are things that you can do to help keep them safe. You should know which food(s) they are allergic to, and how to help them prevent an allergic reaction. There is no cure for a food allergy; avoiding the food allergen(s) is the best way to stay safe.

## IN CASE OF EMERGENCY?

- 1 Give epinephrine
- 2 Call 9-1-1
- 3 Give epinephrine again
- 4 Go to the nearest hospital
- 5 Call emergency contacts

Symptoms can include trouble breathing, itching, nausea, anxiety and more. Epinephrine is the drug form of adrenaline.

## WHAT IS ANAPHYLAXIS?

Anaphylaxis (anna-fill-axis) is the most severe form of an allergic reaction. It can happen quickly, affect different parts of the body, and can be life-threatening.

## WHAT CAUSES ANAPHYLAXIS?

A food allergy is the most common cause of anaphylaxis, but insect stings, medication, latex, and exercise (typically after eating a specific food) can also cause a reaction.

## COMMON FOOD ALLERGENS:

- Peanut
- Soy
- Sesames
- Tree nuts (e.g. almond, cashew, hazelnut, pistachio)
- Milk
- Eggs
- Seafood (fish, shellfish and crustaceans)

## SYMPTOMS:

**Skin:** Itching, redness, swelling, hives, rash

**Stomach:** Nausea, pain, vomiting, diarrhea

**Other:** Anxiety, sense of doom, loss of consciousness

**Airway:** Trouble breathing, swallowing and speaking, coughing, nasal congestion or hay fever-like symptoms

**Heart:** Weak pulse, pale/blue colour, weak, lightheaded, fainting, shock

## EPINEPHRINE:

Epinephrine is a life-saving medication that can reverse the symptoms of an allergic reaction. The drug helps to reverse symptoms of allergic reactions by:

- Opening the airways by relaxing smooth muscles in the lungs;
- Improving blood pressure by constricting blood vessels;
- Increasing heart rate and work to reduce hives and swelling by stimulating the heart.

Epinephrine is the drug form of adrenaline, a hormone the body produces on its own. Epinephrine is the first line of treatment for those suffering from anaphylaxis and should be used before other medications, including asthma puffers. The drug is administered through an auto-injector, such as EpiPen, and those with allergies should know how to use it.

It is important to remember that if you have received epinephrine you should still go to the hospital for observation. While one shot of epinephrine is usually effective, it is possible to have a second reaction or for symptoms to recur hours after being exposed to the allergen.

## WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY?

If you suspect that you or somebody close to you is having an allergic reaction it is important to seek medical treatment immediately.

### FOLLOW THE 5 EMERGENCY STEPS BELOW:

- 1. Give epinephrine.** If an EpiPen is available, give a dose of epinephrine at the first sign of an allergic reaction.
- 2. Call 9-1-1.** Call your emergency medical services and tell them that someone is having an anaphylactic reaction.
- 3. Give epinephrine again.** If there is no improvement in symptoms after the first dose of epinephrine is administered, give a second dose of epinephrine as early as 5 minutes after the first dose.
- 4. Get to the nearest hospital.** Even if symptoms have stopped or improved, it is important to go to the hospital for observation. The allergic reaction can come back.
- 5. Call emergency contacts.** Call emergency contacts for the person that is having an allergic reaction (parent, guardian, spouse).

## AUTO-INJECTOR 101:

It is important that you know how to use your auto-injector. If you have any questions about your auto-injector or how to use it, ask your doctor. Below are some tips for those who carry an auto-injector:

- Carry your auto-injector with you at all times.
- Let people around you know about your allergy, that you carry an auto-injector and teach them how to use it. Make sure your prescription is up to date and that your auto-injector has not expired.
- Make sure the epinephrine in your auto-injector is effective by making sure it is not stored in extreme heat or cold.

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SOURCE: Food Allergy Canada <http://foodallergycanada.ca/>

If you have any questions about anaphylaxis or anything you've learned from this document, the OMA recommends that you speak with your doctor for further details.

