

Drug Allergy

Drug allergy is an abnormal reaction of the immune system to certain medication. Common medications to produce allergic reactions are antibiotics (especially **penicillin**), pain medication known as **non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. diclofenac, ibuprofen, phenylbutazone, aspirin, indomethacin, mefenamic acid)** and anti-epileptics.

True allergy to medication is not very common and many patients are mislabelled especially with penicillin allergy. The chances of developing an allergy to medication are higher when you take medication frequently or when it is given by injection or rubbed on the skin (topical) rather than taken by mouth.

Allergic symptoms may be mild or severe and may occur within minutes to an hour (immediate reaction) or take days to weeks (non-immediate reaction).

Immediate reaction occurs usually less than one hour after drug exposure and symptoms include:

- Anaphylaxis experienced as:
 - ✓ itch, hives, red skin, swelling
 - ✓ nausea, vomiting, severe stomach cramps, diarrhoea
 - ✓ Feeling faint, dizziness, sweating, palpitations, feeling of impending doom
 - ✓ sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, closing of throat, cough, whistling sound during breathing out (wheeze), shortness of breath, trouble breathing

or

- Hives or swelling without other symptoms

or

- Worsening of asthma with medication known as Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs:

Non-immediate reactions can occur on the skin only or involve organs in the body.

Patients may experience rash or localised red skin or in some cases fever, widespread rash and involvement of organs e.g. liver. Symptoms occur after days to weeks of exposure to the medication.

Diagnosis include skin testing and sometimes drug challenge. Drug challenge involves giving medication to disprove allergy or to find a safe alternative drug for the patient.

If there is no other alternative to the allergic medication, patients undergo a medical procedure known as desensitisation.

Dr Mabelane is highly experienced in drug allergy and can help to diagnose your drug allergy or find a safe alternative drug to use.