

Penicillin: What Is It and How to Check for a Penicillin Allergy

What Does Penicillin Do?

Penicillin is a type of medicine called an antibiotic **that helps fight infections** which may cause:

- Earaches
- Sinus problems
- Strep throat
- Pneumonia

It usually **works well**, **costs less**, and **causes fewer problems** than other antibiotics.

Common Penicillin Medicines:

- Amoxicillin
- Ampicillin
- Augmentin®
- Penicillin

Can You Be Allergic to Penicillin?

- **10 out of 100 people** say they are allergic to penicillin.
- But when doctors test them, **9 out of 10 are not really allergic.**
- Some people who were allergic **stop being allergic over time:**
 - After 5 years, **half** are no longer allergic
 - After 10 years, **8 out of 10** are no longer allergic

Why This Matters

If someone thinks they're allergic to penicillin, they get second-choice medicine.

These second-choice antibiotics:

- **Don't work as well**
- **Cost more**
- **Can make bacteria stronger**, which makes infections harder to treat

What a Real Penicillin Allergy Looks Like

If these things happen within **minutes to a few hours** after taking penicillin, it might be a real allergy:

- Trouble breathing or loud breathing sounds
- Tight throat or hoarse voice
- Swelling of lips, tongue, face, or eyes
- Bad stomach cramps, lots of diarrhea, or throwing up over and over
- Red, itchy spots or welts on your skin
- Skin turns red all over
- Feeling dizzy, lightheaded, or looking pale

Why Do People Think They're Allergic to Penicillin When They're Not?

- **Side effects can be confusing**
Upset stomach, diarrhea, or yeast infections are common and not true allergies.
 - **Family history isn't a sure sign**
Just because a parent or sibling is allergic doesn't mean your child is.
 - **Rashes can be tricky**
Rashes that show up days later might be from a virus or a mild reaction that won't happen again.
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How Can You Find Out If Your Child Is Really Allergic to Penicillin?

- Your doctor can **send your child to a specialist** to check for a real allergy.
 - Many **insurance plans pay for allergy testing**, but it's smart to **call and check first**.
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What Happens After the Doctor Sends You to a Specialist?

If the allergy might be from **amoxicillin or penicillin**, your child may go to the **Infectious Diseases Antibiotic Challenge Clinic** OR the **Allergy Clinic**.

For **Infectious Diseases Antibiotic Challenge Clinic**:

- **A nurse will call you** to talk about your child's health history.
- The specialist will review this information, decide if your child needs a test, and which test is best for your child.
- **A nurse will call you back to set up a time** for your child's allergy test, give instructions, and answer your questions.

For **Allergy Clinic**:

- A member of the clinic will call you to set up a time for your child's first appointment.
 - This visit with the specialist may be **in person in the clinic or by video without coming to the clinic**.
 - The specialist will talk to you about your child's health history, then decide if your child needs a test, and which test is best for your child.
 - If the visit is in person and there's enough time, the specialist may **do the test right away**. If not, they will **schedule the test for another day**.
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What Happens During the Antibiotic Challenge Test?

- **Doctors and nurses** do the test in a safe place.
- They may give your child a **small dose of the medicine by mouth**.
- If needed, they may do a **skin test first**, then give the medicine by mouth.
- After your child takes the medicine, the team **watches for 75 minutes** for a reaction.
- At the end, you'll get **clear instructions** about which antibiotics your child **can and cannot take**.