

# Do you really have a penicillin allergy?

If not, you may not be getting the best antibiotic for your infection



## The facts

While 10% of all people in the US report an allergic reaction to penicillins...

Studies actually show that less than 1% of the population is truly allergic to penicillin.

### Why might this be?

- Most people who have a penicillin allergy lose their allergy within 10 years.
- Side effects from a medication might seem like allergic reactions, but they are not the same. Some people may have incorrectly labeled a side effect as an allergic reaction.
- Some people may believe they are allergic to penicillin due to a family member's allergy. People do not need to avoid penicillin if a family member is allergic.

### References:

1. CDC. Is It Really a Penicillin Allergy? <https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/pdfs/penicillin-factsheet.pdf>
2. Khan DA, Banerji A, Blumenthal KG, et al. Drug allergy: A 2022 practice parameter update. Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. 2022;150(6):1333-1393. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaci.2022.08.028>
3. AAAAI. Penicillin Allergy FAQ. Updated Sept 2023. <https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/conditions-library/allergies/penicillin-allergy-faq>

## Side effects vs. allergies

A **side effect** is a symptom caused by a medication you took. Side effects are common. They are usually mild and go away quickly. Examples of common side effects include feeling sick to your stomach and having diarrhea.

An **allergic reaction** is caused by the immune system's reaction to a medication. Allergies are rare and usually happen every time you take a particular medication. These occur right away or shortly after taking a medication. Allergic reactions can include itchy rashes, trouble breathing, wheezing, and anaphylaxis.

## Why does it matter?

Penicillin and other similar antibiotics often work better for certain infections (i.e., antibiotics given before surgery or dental procedures).

People who report a penicillin allergy often receive other antibiotics that cause more side effects.

If your health care provider discovers that you do not have a true penicillin allergy, they will have more options to treat your bacterial infection.

**Make sure you're getting the best antibiotic for your infection. Talk to your health care provider today about your penicillin allergy.**