



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

"Health Matters" column

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Medication Allergy Versus Intolerance

Knowing the difference between a true medication allergy and a physical intolerance is important for you and your medical team

PARK RAPIDS, MN (March 5, 2015) – As you enter any medical facility, you are probably asked several times, "Do you have any allergies?"

This is obviously an important question as anyone who treats you will need to know your allergies before any medications can be given to you. However, they will also need to know what type of reaction you had to the medication so they can determine if you have an actual allergy or are merely intolerant to the specific agent.

So what exactly is the difference between an allergy and intolerance to a medication?

They are both unwanted reactions to a medication or device.

A true allergic reaction will typically involve a degree of one or more of the following symptoms: hives, rash, itching, facial/tongue swelling, throat swelling, rapid heart rate, and shortness of breath. Anaphylaxis is a SEVERE allergic reaction that is life-threatening.

If you have an anaphylactic reaction to a medication, you will not be able to use any related (chemically similar) type of medications. For example, if you have a severe

penicillin allergy, you would not be able to get Amoxicillin, Ampicillin, Nafcillin, Augmentin, Zosyn or any other medication in that family due to the risk of a severe reaction.

Symptoms of drug intolerance may include nausea, vomiting, confusion, hallucinations, dizziness, abdominal pain, cough, dry mouth or diarrhea. This type of reaction would still allow you to be able to try a different medication from the same family. Sometimes different products from a family are better tolerated than others.

As more bacteria are becoming resistant to antibiotics, this will become a very big deal. For example, if a patient lists several antibiotics as allergies when they merely caused an upset stomach, then the patient later developed a severe infection, a practitioner may be limited in choosing the antibiotic needed to treat this infection.

This could be a life or death situation in some instances.

So, the next time you are asked about your allergies, please be specific about the type of reaction you had as well as listing the medication.

Editor's note: *CHI St. Joseph's Health brings Health Matters news of interest to you and your loved ones. Keep in mind that our intent is to share general knowledge in summary form about general wellness, education outreach and services available to you. It's important to talk to your primary care provider about any healthcare-related questions you may have.*

SOURCE: Some information contained in this column comes from sciencebasedmedicine.org.

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