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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Anaphylaxis (page 1 of 3)

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is an extreme and severe allergic reaction which affects the whole body. It is usually caused by certain foods, insect bites or medicines. The patient's immune system overreacts in a harmful way by releasing histamine in large amounts. This causes blood vessels to become leaky causing swelling in the body tissues.

What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?

- Swelling and itching
- Flushing of the face
- Weals/hives on the skin – looks like nettle rash

What are the signs of anaphylaxis?

- swelling of the face, lips, tongue or throat
- difficulty in swallowing or speaking due to swelling in the throat
- wheezing or difficulty breathing due to swelling in the airways
- sudden feeling of lightheadedness
- loss of colour and feeling cold and clammy as the blood pressure drops
- collapse and loss of consciousness

What can trigger a reaction?

Common causes include:

- Food such as nuts (e.g. peanuts, almonds, walnuts, cashews, and Brazil nuts), sesame, fish, shellfish, dairy products and eggs.
- Non-food causes include wasp or bee stings, natural latex (rubber), penicillin or any other drug or injection.
- Medicines such as antibiotics and rarely immunisations.

What can you do at the time of an attack?

Antihistamines

A mild reaction can be treated with a dose of antihistamine such as chlorphenamine (Piriton). The liquid will be absorbed quicker and work faster than a tablet.

Inhalers

Children's Community Nursing Team

Tel: 01722 336262 ext 4053

Asthma inhalers such as Salbutamol will improve breathing and wheezing symptoms if the child normally uses these.

Adrenaline (also called epinephrine)

Adrenaline works by tightening the blood vessels to reduce the swelling. This is given by injection into the muscle of the thigh. The adrenaline comes in a pre-loaded syringe and the whole dose is given. Each syringe has only one dose. If there is no improvement a second dose can be given after 5-10 minutes. If adrenaline has been used then your child must come to hospital for assessment.

You will be given adrenaline in an 'autoinjector' called EpiPen (or EpiPen Junior for younger children). We will give you 2 doses that should be carried with your child at all times. Any further doses can be arranged by your GP.

How to use adrenaline

This will be taught by the children's community nursing team either before discharge or as soon as possible after you have left hospital. An information pack will be given for you to take home after the teaching session. This includes a DVD about using your EpiPen and a sheet about what to do in an emergency.

The school nurses will arrange teaching in the school. If your child attends a nursery or day care, they will arrange their own staff training. We suggest you speak to your child's nursery/school staff to make them aware that your child carries an EpiPen.

What happens next?

After an episode of anaphylaxis, your child will be admitted to the children's ward. Usually they can go home the next day. They will be prescribed 2-3 days of oral medicine called Prednisolone (a steroid) to prevent the symptoms coming back some hours later (this is called the biphasic reaction).

You will be referred to the children's allergy clinic here in Salisbury. At the clinic appointment further testing may be done to find out what caused the allergic reaction. This may be a blood test or a skin prick test.

Remember:

- Avoid triggers.
- Schools, child care services should be informed .
- Always carry an EpiPen and tell your child's school, childminder, nursery that you child has an EpiPen.
- Take precautions when travelling or eating out.

Looking after your adrenaline pen


- Make sure you carry the pen at all times.
- Protect the pen from heat and light.

- Replace the pen if it has been used or damaged.
- Check the expiry date and order a replacement from your GP in plenty of time.

Where can I find out more about anaphylaxis?

Allergy UK

Helpline 01322 619864

 Website: www.allergyuk.org

Anaphylaxis campaign

Helpline:01252 542029

 Website: www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

MedicAlert

Freephone 0800581420

 Website: www.medicalert.co.uk

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)

 Website: www.nice.org.uk