Sensitivity to Stuff

Common culprits can put your body on the defensive at any time.

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For the more than 50 million Americans who suffer from allergies each year, a host of everyday triggers can make being indoors or outdoors very uncomfortable indeed. We're all familiar with the sneezing, coughing and itching caused when the immune system overreacts to pollen, pet hair, specific foods, insects, mold and substances added to natural fabrics or synthetic materials. What's more, allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in the United States.

Regardless of your allergy, each of the 12 types identified by the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology can result in symptoms that can range from simply annoying to downright life-threatening.

For example, if a person who is allergic to milk drinks the beverage, he or she may risk problems ranging from just an upset stomach to anaphylaxis, a severe reaction that could progress to seizures, an abnormal heartbeat and shock and respiratory distress that could result in death.

Other items can prompt anaphylaxis in some, including stings from insects, such as bees, wasps or hornets, and contact with certain materials, such as latex.

Although allergies generally can't be prevented, allergic reactions can be, stresses the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Once you know you're allergic to certain foods or substances, simply avoid them or use strategies to reduce exposure at home or outdoors. In addition, you can control allergy symptoms with medications or injection therapy.

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