

# For Your Benefit

provides a variety of timely information related to your health care benefits and needs

## Simple Tips for Healthy Eyes

Your eyes are an important part of your health. There are many things you can do to keep them healthy and make sure you are seeing your best. Follow these simple tips for maintaining healthy eyes well into your golden years.

- **Have a comprehensive dilated eye exam.** Many common eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease and age-related macular degeneration often have no warning signs. A comprehensive eye exam is the only way to be sure your eyes are healthy.
- **Know your family's eye health history.** It's important to know if anyone in your family has been diagnosed with a disease or condition since many are hereditary. This will help to determine if you are at higher risk for developing an eye disease or condition.
- **Eat right to protect your sight.** You've heard carrots are good for your eyes, but eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fish can help to keep your eyes healthy, too.
- **Wear protective eyewear.** Wear protective eyewear when playing sports or doing activities around the home. Protective eyewear includes safety glasses and goggles, safety shields, and eye guards specially designed to provide the correct protection for certain activities.
- **Be cool and wear your shades.** Sunglasses are a great fashion accessory, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation.

- **Give your eyes a rest.** If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, try the 20-20-20 rule: Rest your eyes by looking 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes. This can help reduce eyestrain.
- **Clean your hands and your contact lenses—properly.** To avoid the risk of infection, always wash your hands thoroughly before putting in or taking out your contact lenses. Make sure to disinfect contact lenses as instructed and replace them as appropriate.

Don't take your eyes for granted. They are an important element in your overall health.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://vision-care-review.toptenreviews.com/importance-of-vision-care-health.html>

### New Your Benefit Guide for vision now online

The revised benefit booklet, *Your Benefit Guide* for the State Vision Plan, is available online at **[bcbsm.com/som](http://bcbsm.com/som)** and **[www.michigan.gov/mdcs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdcs)**. The benefit booklet provides charts that summarize your vision benefits, contact information, eligibility guidelines and information on what to do if you need to make changes to your coverage.





## Don't let allergies get the best of you

When most people think of allergies, they think of a reaction to a seasonal substance – the sneezing and sinus congestion that usually begins in the spring and ends a few weeks later. However, there are many substances that can cause an allergic reaction.

Some allergic reactions are just bothersome, causing a runny nose; some reactions can be life-threatening. Knowing possible allergic triggers and the symptoms of a reaction can help you explain your medical condition to your doctor, or can save your life. Call your doctor for guidance if you think you're having an allergic reaction, or before you try a treatment.

### Allergies:

## Nothing to sneeze at

Allergies are an exaggerated immune response or reaction to a substance. And while allergic reactions are generally not harmful, they can vary from mild to life-threatening for the more than 60 million Americans who experience them. Reactions can include:

- Runny, stuffy nose
- Watery, itchy eyes
- Minor skin reactions (hives, rashes)
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Asthmatic symptoms (wheezing or cough)
- Anaphylactic shock

### Cold or allergy?

If your cold-like symptoms last longer than two weeks, you probably have an allergy.

There are three categories of allergens: environmental, drug and food.

### Environmental allergens are everywhere

If you're allergic to environmental substances, it's hard to avoid them because they're elements you touch and inhale, both indoors and outdoors. If you suspect you're allergic to something around you, note when your symptoms occur. If they occur the same time each year, you may be allergic to something seasonal such as tree, grass or weed pollen. Allergies that last all year may be caused by indoor elements such as dust, dust mites, mold or pet dander.

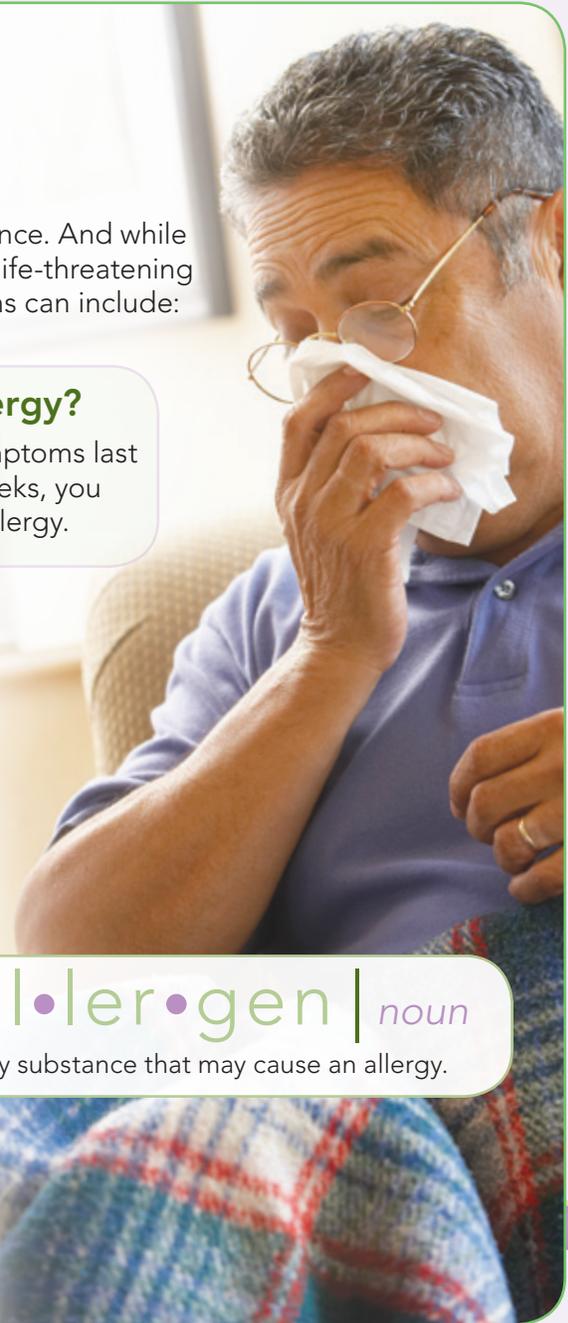
### Try avoidance first

If you think you may be allergic to something around you, here are a few things you can do to help yourself:

- Be aware of when pollen levels are high and avoid going outside.
- Don't smoke.
- Close your house and car windows, especially at night.
- Encase your mattress, box spring and pillows with covers that are dust-mite proof. *Continued on next page.*

al•ler•gen | noun

Any substance that may cause an allergy.



## You may be allergic to...

- Chemicals
- Cigarette smoke
- Dust
- Dust mites
- Fungus spores
- Inhalants
- Insect bites
- Insects (such as cockroaches)
- Jewelry
- Latex
- Metals (coins)
- Mildew
- Mold
- Parasites (such as lice)
- Pet dander
- Poison ivy or/and other irritating plants
- Pollen
- Radon
- Rodents
- Soaps and detergents
- Sun

### Continued from previous page.

- Use an air conditioner with a HEPA filter.
- Keep your cat or dog out of your bedroom.
- Select wood floors, especially in the bedroom. If you must have carpet, choose a synthetic or cotton carpet with a tight weave and a very short pile.
- Change the central heating filter once a month to cut down on dust and other allergens in the air.

If these suggestions don't help, you may need medication. Talk with your doctor about the choice that's best for you. Contact your doctor even if you're planning to take an over-the-counter treatment. Make sure they're safe to take with other medications you may be taking.

### Drug allergies – when drugs make you sick

Drug allergic reactions can be unsettling. The most common drugs that cause reactions include:

- Penicillin and other related antibiotics
- IV contrast dye (used for x-rays)
- Sulfa preparation
- Anticonvulsants
- Insulin

If you have a drug reaction, even if it's only a rash, call your doctor. Your doctor will probably tell you to stop taking the medication and may prescribe a substitute medication. If you're having a severe reaction, go to the emergency room or call 911.

### Tell all of your providers that you have a drug allergy

Once you know you're allergic to a drug, take precautions to avoid a reaction:

- Tell all of your doctors, including your dentist, that you're allergic to the drug.

- Make sure your allergy is highlighted in all of your medical records.
- Wear an alert bracelet or necklace indicating your allergy.

### Food allergies: watch what you eat... even if you don't see it

Food allergies tend to be more serious than other allergies; the allergen can be less obvious and the reaction can be more severe. Touching, inhaling or eating a food can affect your breathing, digestive system, skin or cardiovascular system.

The most common food allergens include:

- Seafood, especially shellfish
- Tree nuts, such as walnuts and pecans
- Peanuts
- Eggs
- Wheat
- Soy

### Work with your doctor to control your allergies

To find out if you have environmental or food allergies, go to your doctor. He or she may recommend that you seek care from an allergist. Besides avoiding the allergen, your doctor may suggest medications such as antihistamines, decongestions or steroids. If you have a food allergy, your doctor may prescribe an epinephrine injection (EpiPen®) in case you unknowingly ingest an allergen. You may have an allergy test to identify your environmental and food allergens. The doctor may suggest immunotherapy, or allergy shots, to desensitize your body's response to allergens.

Seniors need to be especially careful with allergy medications. Some medications used to treat your allergy symptoms may cause drowsiness and dizziness, which can result in falls. Be aware of drug interactions if you use over-the-counter medications along with your prescribed medicines. Also, some decongestants can raise your blood pressure, so they're not recommended for people who have high blood pressure or glaucoma. Always talk with your doctor before you take any medication.

Living with allergies can be tricky, but you and your allergist can devise a plan to manage them by avoiding triggers, maintaining a medication regimen and developing an action plan if you do have a reaction.

#### Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vital Signs, May 2011. MedPlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health [FDA.gov/Food Allergens](http://FDA.gov/Food Allergens)

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State of Michigan Retirees

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## How to reach us

For benefit information or claim inquiries, call or write the BCBSM State of Michigan Customer Service Center.

### To call

1-800-843-4876

Our customer service representatives are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday excluding holidays.

### To write

Please send all correspondence to:  
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