

ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN



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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

WHAT IS ALPHA-GAL SYNDROME?



Alpha-gal Syndrome (AGS) is a severe allergy that can happen after a tick bite. It causes allergic reactions when people eat red meat or use products derived from animals, such as cows, pigs, or deer.

Ticks carry a sugar molecule called alpha-gal, which is also in red meat. When the tick bites, it can transfer a small amount of alpha-gal into the person. In some people, this causes an immune response. The immune response triggers an allergic reaction each time the person comes into contact with alpha-gal in the future. It can happen when they eat red meat, such as beef, pork, or venison, or come into contact with products made from other parts of those animals, including dairy products, gelatin, or beauty products.

In the United States, Lone Star ticks are the most common transmitters of alpha-

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gal to humans. While it is possible for anyone to be bitten by a tick and have a reaction, adults react more commonly than children.

The best way to avoid getting AGS is to avoid tick bites! If you are going into areas of dense trees or shrubbery, use tick spray or wear tick-proof clothing. If possible, stay out of tall grass and thick woods, and walk in the center of trails.

After coming in from outdoors, check your skin, clothes, and pets for ticks. Take a shower and look for ticks on your body and always remove any ticks right away.

If you develop symptoms of a food allergy after a tick bite, contact your doctor. Make sure to tell them about your tick bite, to help them see if your illness may be related. It is important to get medical treatment for food allergy symptoms, even if the symptoms happen several hours after eating.

Get emergency medical treatment if you have symptoms of a serious allergic reaction. If you have trouble breathing, called anaphylaxis, or a constricted airway, rapid pulse, are feeling dizzy or light-headed, drooling, not able to swallow, or have full-body redness and warmth.

In order to diagnose you, a doctor may ask about your symptoms, medical history, and daily habits, take a blood sample for alpha-gal

antibody testing, or recommend allergy testing to confirm or rule out other potential allergens.

If you are diagnosed with AGS, see an allergy doctor, known as an allergist, for help. They specialize in treating allergic reactions and can help develop a plan to help you cope with your diagnosis. They can also refer you to other health-care specialists, such as a dietitian, mental health therapist, or home health service if needed.

Other recommendations for people living with AGS include avoiding eating red meat (beef, pork, lamb, deer, rabbit), and avoiding other potential sources of alpha-gal from animal products such as dairy products, gelatin, and certain beauty products. Read labels carefully to avoid trigger products. Talk to a doctor before taking any new medicine or vaccines. It is also important to avoid new tick bites, as they can make the allergy worse.

REFERENCE:

<https://www.cdc.gov/alpha-gal-syndrome/about>

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