

Allergic Reactions and Rashes

Antibiotics and pain medications are commonly prescribed after surgery to help in your recovery. Unfortunately, sometimes an undiagnosed allergy will arise to one of these medications. This often starts a few days after taking the medication and usually begins with some itching followed by a rash forming. A typical drug rash will start in one or a few areas of the body, but can then progress anywhere from the trunk, arms, legs, and face. This may or may not be near the area of your surgery, which helps distinguish a drug-related rash from a contact allergy.

A contact rash is an allergy to the tapes, glues, or adhesives placed on top of the closed incision or those that help secure the dressings in place. This can start within a few days of surgery or arise several weeks later. These often appear as pinkish red skin with tiny blisters that form. These blisters can break and crust over, and the general area looks weepy.

If you feel an allergic rash is starting (drug-related or contact allergy), the first step is to stop any potentially allergic substance. This includes any new medications that might be causing this, or removing any tapes, glues, or adhesives that are irritating. Don't worry- the incision will not open as there are usually multiple layers of dissolvable sutures under your skin which will keep the incision closed. It is however normal to have some of the small blisters peel away, leaving a few wet-looking, raw areas. These will heal quickly (within a few days). Call our office and/or send in a picture if you have any concerns. This also allows us to substitute alternative pain medications or antibiotics if the source of the allergic reaction was due to a medication.

The next step is to start regularly taking an **antihistamine**. This includes **Allegra, Claritin, Zyrtec, and Benadryl**. All of these are over the counter and readily available at any drug store. The first three are non-drowsy formulations that can be taken in the daytime, while Benadryl tends to make people a little more sleepy and is great to help with symptoms at night. Topical antihistamines such as Benadryl cream can also help. Avoid applying *steroid creams* (such as *Cortizone, Triamcinolone*) as these can inhibit wound healing and cause your surgical site to not heal correctly. Try not to scratch the areas as this can cause additional histamine release by the body and intensify the rash. Instead, try patting or tapping the area of itching. You can also apply cold packs for some comfort.

Aveeno Oatmeal Bath is another trick that can help soothe irritated skin. This usually comes in a box or 8-12 packets and is found at any drug store. Rather than place in a tub, we recommend dissolving a packet into a large bowl of warm water. You can soak a washcloth in the mixture and then place it on any affected area for 15-30 minutes. Reapply as desired. Colloidal oatmeal is a natural skin treatment that helps relieve itching and irritations.

If you feel flushed or warm from the rash, try placing a hypoallergenic moisturizer such as CeraVe lotion in the fridge. Apply the cold lotion to areas of flushing to help cool and soothe the skin.

We realize allergic reactions can be very frustrating, annoying, and uncomfortable. No one wanted this to happen, but it sometimes does. Try and be patient as sometimes the symptoms will last several days, but the rash itself may take 3 weeks or longer to fully resolve. If symptoms become unbearable, discuss again with your surgeon. Our last resort is prescribing steroid pills which might help with the symptoms but can inhibit wound healing (weaker/wider scars, wound openings). Also, if at any time you develop swelling of your tongue and throat, difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness, or dizziness – seek emergency care immediately (911/emergency room) as these may be sign of a more serious allergic reaction. Do not wait for the office or surgeon to call you back in this case.