

Latex Allergy

One of a series of fact sheets produced by the Family Support Service

Sensitivity to latex (natural rubber) can be a problem for people with spina bifida because of the frequency with which they come into contact with it. Many healthcare products contain latex so people with spina bifida (and medical professionals) are exposed to it on a regular basis - either during surgery (through the use of latex gloves and anaesthetic equipment) or during bladder and bowel management (through the use of latex tubing, gloves and catheters).

Latex itself is a cloudy white liquid which comes from a rubber tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*. Once a liquid has been tapped from the tree, chemicals are added to it which provide the strength and elasticity characteristic of many rubber products. Naturally rubber latex is therefore composed of proteins and added chemicals, some of which would be removed during the later stages of production. The increased incidence of this sensitivity is thought to be related to the general increase in the use of latex products.

The reactions that can occur in an allergic response to latex can range from mild irritation of the skin to more serious general manifestations of anaphylactic or major shock.

There are at present tests available to assess the sensitivity of the individual to latex. It is also possible to perform skin testing for latex allergy.

Common household and hospital products containing latex include:

Household gloves
Hospital gloves
Condoms
Wheelchair tyres
Adhesive tapes (sticky plasters)
Some urinary catheters
Some enema tubing
Protective sheets
Balloons and rubber balls
Art supplies
Some dental equipment
Baby bottle teats and dummies
Elastic on clothes
Beach toys
Chewing gum

Research has shown that proteins found in certain foods show similar immune system reaction to the proteins found in latex. So, if your mouth itches when you eat any of the foods listed below, you could be allergic to latex as well:

Bananas
Kiwi Fruit
Potatoes
Mangoes
Tomatoes
Avocados
Chestnuts

If you have any questions or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Family Support Workers at:

Scottish Spina Bifida Association - Family Support Service

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