

PATIENT INFORMATION BROCHURE

ADVERSE DRUG REACTION

Adverse reactions to drugs are common and may be due to side-effects, toxic effects (overdose), allergy, and intolerance of drug interactions with other drugs.

DRUG ALLERGY

- A drug allergy is a reaction to a drug that is caused by the immune system. These kinds of reactions can be *immediate* or *delayed-onset* reactions.
- *Immediate reactions* may present with urticaria (hives/'bommels'), swelling, wheezing and anaphylaxis (collapse). A typical example is the reaction to penicillin antibiotics.
- *Delayed reactions* occur 1 to 3 days after exposure. These reactions may present with fever, swollen glands or maculopapular rash (red with small bumps).
- *Contact dermatitis* is a type of delayed drug allergy caused by drugs coming into contact with the skin. Local anaesthetics, hair dyes and parabens (*preservative*) can all cause contact dermatitis.
- *Photosensitive reactions* occur only in the areas where the skin is exposed to sunlight. Drugs that cause these reactions include doxycycline, ciprofloxacin, furosemide, ibuprofen, griseofulvin, isotretinoin and sulphonamides.

RISK FACTORS

- People at higher risk for developing a drug allergy include young and middle-aged adults especially females. Drugs that are given via the intravenous route or are given in repeated or prolonged courses are more likely to cause allergy.

DIAGNOSIS

- The diagnosis of a drug allergy is made by taking a history of the typical features that occur after exposure to a particular drug.
- It is important to note the timing from exposure to the drug to the development of symptoms as well as the dose and the route and frequency of administration

TESTS

- Tests that can be done to help make the diagnosis include blood tests, skin tests and a drug challenge.
- *Blood tests* include a full blood count, tryptase and IgE antibody levels.
- *Skin tests* include skin prick tests, intradermal tests and patch tests.
- A *drug challenge* involves giving the suspected drug at incremental doses and observing the patient for signs of any reactions.

MANAGEMENT

- Discontinue the drug immediately
- Wear a medic-alert bracelet
- Inform all family, caregivers and doctors about the allergy
- Check ingredients of generic and over-the-counter medications
- Avoid drugs in the same chemical group
- Ask your doctor for a written list of medications to avoid