

ALLERGY RISK DON'T OVERTEST

A test at risk of being overused, as indicated by the: Italian Society of Allergy, Asthma and Clinical Immunology

Probably due to an excess of caution, doctors too frequently prescribe tests to determine the presence of allergic reactions (allergy tests) and to identify possible drug or food allergies. This occurs even when a patient's personal history (in medical terms: medical history) does not indicate a particular allergy risk and even when the patient has no symptoms.

Often, on the night before surgery, an allergy test is almost automatically requested for the drugs intended to be used in both local and general anaesthesia. It is a frequent and overused test, especially for patients with a history of suspected or established allergy to other agents unrelated to drugs. For example, if a patient is allergic to dust mites and pollen, then he/she will automatically be given an allergy test for an anaesthetic.

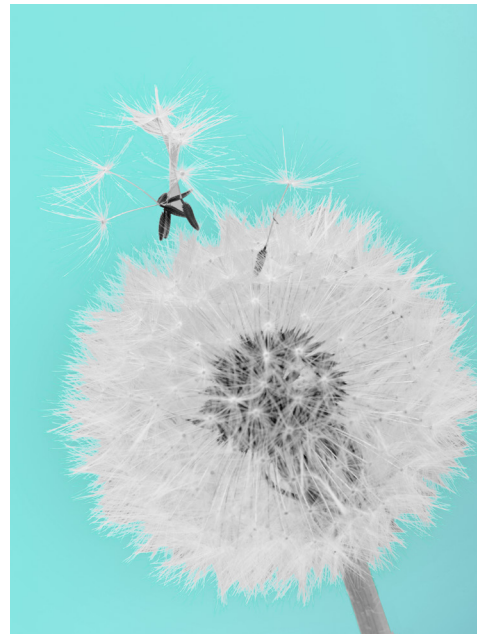
Allergy tests for food allergens, meanwhile, are often requested due to the presence of symptoms that really shouldn't make one suspect allergies. These include chronic swelling of the abdomen after meals, headache, halitosis and canker sores. Recent scientific studies have brought to light that these tests are neither rational nor free from risks:

- There is a risk of not giving the patient drugs that he/she needs or limiting diet in an arbitrary and inadequate way, even if in

reality he/she is not allergic
- Giving the patient unnecessary allergy tests may create new sensitizations to the tested allergens.

LET'S UNDERSTAND WHY

In a patient with no symptoms indicating a particular risk of allergic reaction, a positive allergy test only indicates an immune system



sensitization to the tested antigen, but does not mean that the person will indeed have an allergic reaction in the future.

Likewise, a negative test result only verifies that the patient is not sensitive to the given antigen in that moment, but it doesn't say anything about possible future allergies. In short, the tests risk being unnecessarily alarming and falsely reassuring at the same time.

WHEN AN ALLERGY TEST MAY BE ADVISABLE

Allergy tests have value when the patient has specific symptoms.

- Urticaria or other similar muco-cutaneous manifestations.
 - Swelling under the skin (angioedema), sharp fall in blood pressure, breathing difficulties.
 - If there are symptoms associated with certain organs, or if an organ is damaged.
- In the absence of these signs or the aforementioned concerns, allergy tests are unnecessary. Food and drug allergy tests are recommended when there is real clinical suspicion of past allergic reactions tied to the substances to be tested.

To learn more: "Guida alle Allergie" (in Italian)
Altroconsumo Practical Guides
www.altroconsumo.it/guidepratiche.
Project "Doing more does not mean doing better - Choosing Wisely Italy"
www.choosingwiselyitaly.org
www.slowmedicine.it

ALLERGY TESTS: ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



- Before making any decisions regarding allergy tests, it is important that the doctor gather as much information as possible about the patient and his/her medical history, carefully evaluating any suspected allergies, in order to correctly direct him/her and avoid unnecessary procedures.
- Do not ask to have an allergy test if you do not have allergy symptoms. If you do have symptoms, do not ask for an allergy test for substances that differ from the ones to which you suspect to be allergic.
- If you have symptoms affecting the stomach and intestine, first turn to a gastroenterologist. Such symptoms in fact are rarely caused by food allergies. Only if the gastroenterological exams indicate a possible, rare illness with allergic components is it appropriate to visit an allergist.