Quorn (mycoprotein) allergy

Quorn® allergy is rare in the UK, but for those who do have it, it's possible it could lead to anaphylaxis (ana-fil-ax-is). Reactions to Quorn are usually caused by an allergy to mycoprotein, a fungal protein used to make Quorn, but can sometimes be caused by other ingredients. Speak to your general practitioner (GP) if you think you might be allergic to Quorn so you can get the right diagnosis.

What is Quorn allergy?

Quorn allergy is a type of food allergy. Food allergy occurs when the body's immune system wrongly identifies a food as a threat. When this happens, the body releases chemicals, such as histamine, in response. It is the release of these chemicals that causes symptoms.

People who are allergic to Quorn products are usually allergic to the mycoprotein in Quorn, but sometimes people are allergic to other ingredients such as wheat, egg and milk. Mycoprotein is a protein that comes from the fungus *Fusarium venenatum*. It is **only** found in Quorn branded products, which are made by the manufacturer Marlow Foods. Mycoprotein is **not** in any other food products in the UK.

Some people report **only** stomach or gut problems after eating Quorn, but this is a different type of reaction that some people call a food intolerance. These reactions tend to give delayed symptoms (hours to days later) and are not life threatening.

This factsheet focuses on **Quorn allergy** - which can cause rapid, serious reactions including anaphylaxis. You can find out more about the difference between a Quorn allergy and intolerance below.

What are the symptoms of Quorn allergy?

The symptoms of Quorn allergy often come on quickly but can sometimes take up to four hours to start.

Mild to **moderate** symptoms may include:

- a red raised itchy rash (known as hives or urticaria) anywhere on the body
- swelling of the face, lips and/or eyes

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- a tingling or itchy feeling in the mouth
- mild throat tightness
- stomach pain, vomiting or diarrhoea

More serious symptoms (anaphylaxis)

More serious symptoms are often referred to as the **ABC** symptoms and can include:

- **AIRWAY** - swelling in the throat, tongue or upper airways, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing.
- **BREATHING** - sudden onset wheezing, breathing difficulty, noisy breathing, persistent cough.
- **CIRCULATION** - dizziness, feeling faint, sudden sleepiness, confusion, pale clammy skin, loss of consciousness or collapse.

The term for this more serious reaction is **anaphylaxis** (pronounced ana-fil-ax-is).

Most healthcare professionals consider an allergic reaction to be anaphylaxis when it involves difficulty breathing or affects the heart rhythm or blood pressure. Any one or more of the **ABC** symptoms above may be present.

In extreme cases there could be a dramatic fall in blood pressure. The person may become weak and floppy and may have a sense of something terrible happening. Any of the ABC symptoms may lead to collapse and loss of consciousness and, on rare occasions, can be fatal.

Read more about anaphylaxis.

Read more about what to do in an emergency.

Treating symptoms

If you have mild allergic symptoms, you may be prescribed antihistamine medicine that you take by mouth. But if you are at risk of a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), you may be prescribed adrenaline – the emergency medicine used to treat anaphylaxis. It is also known as epinephrine.

Because anaphylaxis can happen very quickly, adrenaline is available in different forms that are designed to be easy to use. It's important to know exactly how and when to use your prescribed adrenaline. Healthcare professionals can show you how to use it, and

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there are also resources such as practice devices and videos on manufacturer websites.

Options currently available on prescription in the UK include:

- **Adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs)** – such as EpiPen and Jext.
- **Intranasal adrenaline** – EURneffy, a needle-free nasal spray.
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You must carry two in-date forms of prescribed adrenaline at all times as a second dose may be needed if symptoms do not improve after five minutes or get worse.

Find out more about what to do in an emergency.
Find out more about adrenaline.

Getting a diagnosis

If you think you may be allergic to Quorn, see your GP who can refer you to a specialist allergy clinic if needed. They can find a clinic in your area from the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (BSACI).

It's important to get a referral even if your symptoms were mild because it can be hard to tell if future allergic reactions could be more serious.

While you are waiting for the referral, keep a diary of all the symptoms/reactions you have had to Quorn. Keep details of the exact Quorn products you had eaten at the time, how much you ate, details of the symptoms, and how long the symptoms started after eating the Quorn. This information will help the clinician to make an accurate diagnosis.

Once you get a referral, the consultant will discuss your medical history and symptoms with you. They might suggest skin prick tests, blood tests, and food challenge tests to help diagnose the allergy and work out how serious it may be.

These tests can help find out if you are allergic to mycoprotein or another ingredient in Quorn products.

Read more about allergy testing.

What can mean you're at higher risk?

Some clues that you might be at higher risk of more serious reactions are:

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- you have already had a serious reaction, with any of the **'ABC'** symptoms.
- you have asthma, especially if it is not well controlled.
- you have reacted to a tiny amount of Quorn.

If you have asthma and it is not well controlled, this could make an allergic reaction worse. Make sure you discuss this with your GP, nurse, or allergy specialist and take any prescribed medicines.

Avoiding Quorn

Once you have been diagnosed with a Quorn allergy, you will need to avoid Quorn and foods that contain it.

Mycoprotein is found only in Quorn branded products, made by Marlow foods. It's **not** in any other food products in the UK. This means you will need to avoid all Quorn products, but you **don't** need to avoid other meat substitutes.

Quorn is **not** one of the **14 major food allergens** that must be highlighted by law, so it **won't be** emphasised in ingredient lists and will appear as a standard ingredient. **Always** read ingredient labels carefully to check for Quorn or mycoprotein.

When eating out

Quorn is used as a meat substitute by many restaurants, cafes, hotels, takeaways and other catering businesses as part of their vegan and vegetarian ranges.

As described above, restaurants are **not** required by law to provide information about Quorn because it's **not** included in the **top 14 major food allergens**. This means you will need to ask staff directly if the food you'd like to order contains Quorn and if there is a risk of cross contamination. Let them know that even small quantities can cause an allergic reaction and don't be afraid to ask staff to check with the chef.

Meat alternatives are not always made with Quorn, as they can be made from other sources such as soya, pea or wheat. So always ask, as the food may be safe for you.

Read about shopping and preparing food.

Which restaurants and cafes use Quorn?

Some well-known chains that have used Quorn in their ingredients include the following, but other companies use it too:

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- Greggs – for their vegan sausage rolls
- Pizza Express
- Pizza Hut
- Wetherspoons
- KFC
- Costa Coffee

These are just some examples, always check before you eat.

Could other ingredients in Quorn cause a reaction?

Quorn products contain a variety of ingredients other than mycoprotein and some of these can cause allergies, such as egg, milk and wheat. Allergy tests can help find out whether one of these may be causing your allergy.

What else might I react to?

People who are allergic to Quorn may also react to mould spores and vice versa. This is because of a process called cross-reactivity – where the proteins in one food or substance are similar to the proteins in another.

Allergy testing can be used to help find out if your allergic symptoms are caused by mycoprotein (Quorn) or other ingredients.

Read about allergy to mould.

How common is Quorn allergy?

It's not known how common Quorn allergy is, but it appears to be rare in the UK.

In 2018, 1,752 people reported experiencing reactions or symptoms after consuming Quorn. These included allergic symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, or a combination of both. Allergic reactions typically came on within four hours of eating Quorn, while gastrointestinal issues—more consistent with a food intolerance than an allergy—usually developed within eight hours.

It's likely that some of these reactions and symptoms were caused by an ingredient other than mycoprotein. Analysis of Marlow Foods' database of reported illnesses from 2003–2017 found the rate of allergic reactions to Quorn is extremely low.

Is it an allergy or an intolerance?

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Not all reactions to Quorn are caused by an allergy. Some people experience what's often called a **food intolerance** instead. Intolerances most often cause delayed onset digestive symptoms such as bloating, stomach pain, wind or diarrhoea. They do not cause anaphylaxis.

Some people who react to Quorn only have gut-related symptoms, and these may be caused by:

- other ingredients in the product (e.g. lactose, wheat, onion, garlic).
- the high fibre content of mycoprotein itself.
- individual sensitivities, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or intolerance to certain fermentable carbohydrates.

To find out more about the different types of food hypersensitivities, like allergies and intolerances, you can visit: The Association of UK Dietitians.

In January 2011, Marlow Foods arranged for an independent expert panel to discuss reports of symptoms caused by mycoprotein. They concluded the number of adverse reactions is very low, and that most were likely linked to the fibre content speeding up digestion in certain individuals:

"The number of reported adverse reactions to mycoprotein is very low and it's likely that most of these incidents relate to the high fibre content. Mycoprotein provides around 5.5g of dietary fibre in 100g of Quorn mince or pieces. The Panel hypothesised that, in certain individuals or under certain conditions, consuming mycoprotein could speed up the normal transit of foods from the small to the large intestine. This could, in turn, cause the fibre in mycoprotein to be fermented very rapidly in the large intestine, leading to symptoms of gastro-intestinal distress of the type reported by some consumers. The small numbers of consumers at risk from this type of gut response may have an imbalance in their normal gut bacteria, an unusual dietary intake of fibre (too low or too high) or may suffer from irritable bowel syndrome."

A 2019 study also found mycoprotein fibre is easily fermented by gut bacteria, which could cause digestive symptoms in people who are sensitive to fermentable carbohydrates.

If you have had symptoms after eating Quorn — whether gut-related or involving other parts of the body — speak to your GP. They can help you find out whether it's an allergy, intolerance, or something else, and advise on next steps.

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Key messages

- Quorn allergy is rare in the UK, but for those who do have it, it's possible it could lead to anaphylaxis.
- Reactions are usually to the mycoprotein in Quorn but are sometimes caused by an allergy or reaction (intolerance) to something else.
- Visit your GP if you have had a reaction after eating Quorn products so you can get the right diagnosis.
- If you are diagnosed with Quorn allergy, you will need to avoid Quorn products and foods that are made with them.
- If you are prescribed adrenaline, carry two devices with you at all times.
- If you are allergic to Quorn, you might also be allergic to mould, and vice versa.

Feedback

Please help us to improve our information resources by sending us your feedback at: - https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/information-resources-feedback/

Sources

All the information we produce is evidence based or follows expert opinion and is checked by our clinical and research reviewers. If you wish to know the sources we used in producing any of our information products or you would like a version of this factsheet with the references included, please contact info@anaphylaxis.org.uk and we will gladly supply details.

Reviewers

The content of this Factsheet has been Peer Reviewed by Tanya Wright, Specialist Allergy Dietician.

Disclosures

We are not aware of any conflicts of interest in relation to the review of this factsheet.

Disclaimer

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The information provided in this factsheet is given in good faith. Every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy. All patients are different, and specific cases need specific advice. There is no substitute for good medical advice provided by a medical professional.

About Anaphylaxis UK

Anaphylaxis UK is the only UK-wide charity solely focused on supporting people at risk of serious, life-threatening allergic reactions. We provide information and support to people living with allergies through our free national helpline and local support groups. We also raise awareness and fundraise to achieve our ultimate aim, to create a safer environment for all people at risk of serious allergies. Visit our website www.anaphylaxis.org.uk and follow us to keep up-to-date with our latest news. We're on Facebook @anaphylaxisUK, LinkedIn, Instagram @anaphylaxisUK, Twitter @AnaphylaxisUK and you can find our podcast here.

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