

Adrenaline Auto-injectors- what you need to know

Your child has been prescribed a self-injecting adrenaline device for allergic emergencies. You have probably heard about this drug before, but here are some important facts about it, because some of what you think you know may not be correct.

Adrenaline is safe, and you already have adrenaline in your body

Adrenaline is a naturally occurring hormone. It is the hormone that is part of our fight-or-flight response. When you are scared or excited, and also when you are exercising, your adrenaline levels surge, but even when you sleep, there is a little adrenaline circulating in your body. An injection from the adrenaline device will increase the level of adrenaline to the range seen under stressful circumstances. Since you have at some point in your life experienced stress, you have already been exposed to the effects of high levels of adrenaline.

If your child were given the injection right now, all that would likely happen is that their heart rate and blood pressure would increase to a moderate degree and that they might feel slightly shaky. Adrenaline is broken down very quickly, and they would not feel this effect for long.

Why You Should Go to the Emergency Department after Using the Adrenaline

You may have been told that your child has to go to the hospital after using the adrenaline device. That's not because of the adrenaline; it's because the allergic reaction probably requires further monitoring. Many patients also need more than one dose of adrenaline or other emergency treatments; that may be due to the severity of the allergic reaction or simply because the device was not used correctly (the most common mistake is not holding the device against the thigh for the time required for the full dose of medication to be delivered). So a trip to the hospital is the safest thing to do after using adrenaline.

Why You Should Not Wait to Use Adrenaline

You might hope the allergic reaction won't be "that bad," and you might be right, but it's important to know that a delay in use of adrenaline is linked to fatal food anaphylaxis. The other risk factor for fatal food reactions is poorly controlled asthma, so if your child has asthma it is really important to keep it under good control.

Why You Should Not Be Afraid of the Adrenaline Device

The device itself might look big, but the injection needle is small, similar to those used for immunisations. As mentioned above, the main side effect your child might experience is feeling a bit shaky after using the device.

For more information

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