

EVERYDAY LIFE

onestopenglish

TEACHER'S
NOTES

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

Age: Teenager/Adult

Level: Upper intermediate (B2)

Time: 45 minutes +

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. read personal accounts of allergies;
2. learn new vocabulary and match it with its meaning.

Language focus: reading, vocabulary related to allergies

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student

PROCEDURE



TEACHING TIP: Before starting class, make sure to read the texts and pick out any vocabulary that you think will be unfamiliar or difficult for your students to understand. You don't necessarily need to pre-teach it as they can often understand it from the context in which it is presented. However, it is important to predict any questions that will come up in the class and have full and clear answers to them.

At the start of class, write the following words on the board:

balloons, dust, a rash, sneezing, latex, washing powder, itchy eyes, a runny nose

Ask the students if they can work out what they have in common. (*Answer: They all either causes of or reactions to allergies in some people.*)

Tell the students to divide them into causes and reactions and see if they can add some other words to each group. Then find out if anyone in the class suffers from an allergy and what causes it.

Hand out the worksheet. Ask students to look at the photos in the warmer and see if they can name the things that cause allergies in the pictures. Next, ask students to read the opening paragraph of 'Spring is in the air', in Exercise 2, making sure to focus on the collocations in the opening sentence (*flowers in bloom, birds signing, insects buzzing*). These will probably be new to them so it's a good idea to spend a little time focusing on the noun + verb construction.

Next, tell students to read four people's descriptions of their allergies and note what each person is allergic to. Who do they think suffers the most as a result of their allergy?



TEACHING TIP: When students encounter common verbs / adjectives with dependent prepositions (*suffer + from, (to be) allergic + to*) for the first time, it's a really good idea to highlight the fact that these words commonly occur together before a noun. Tell them to write an example sentence using the new dependent preposition in a personal context (e.g. *I suffer from asthma*) as this will help them remember it better.

Ask students to do Exercise 3, the matching exercise, and check answers as a class.

Next, ask students to read the allergy fact file in Exercise 4 and find and underline at least three things they didn't know before about allergies.

Finally, students work in pairs in Exercise 5. You could also ask them to role-play a person interested in finding out about allergies and an expert who tells them all about it.

Key:

Exercise 1:

Cheese, chocolate, cats, peanuts, flowers, shellfish, pollen/bee sting

Exercise 2:

Rob: pollen from plane trees

Gabby: chocolate, cheese and red wine

Dan: radishes, balloons, the leaves of willow trees

Brooke: dust and pollen

Exercise 3:

1. d

2. f

3. a

4. b

5. h

6. c

7. e

8. l

9. k

10. i

11. g

12. j

Exercise 4:

students' own answers

Exercise 5:

students' own answers

EVERYDAY LIFE

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WORKSHEET

EXERCISE 1: WARMER

Can you identify the different things that people are often allergic to? What other things do people often suffer from allergies to?

A large rectangular area of white paper with horizontal blue lines for writing. A red pencil is positioned vertically on the left side of the paper.

EVERYDAY LIFE

EXERCISE 2: SPRING IS IN THE AIR

Longer days, warmer evenings, blossoms on the trees, flowers in bloom, birds singing, insects buzzing. Spring is when the natural world wakes up after winter. For many, spring is the best time of the year, a time to be outdoors and enjoy the spectacle of nature coming back to life. But for others spring is hell. All that pollen in the air can mean weeks of misery for hay fever sufferers. But allergies are not just a seasonal problem, and what's more, they're on the increase.



Rob's story

'I didn't start to get hay fever until I was 35. I didn't know what was happening at first. I was walking back home one day when my eyes started itching a lot and I couldn't stop sneezing. I thought I just had a cold coming. But then the next day I went out to do some shopping and the same thing happened. I couldn't understand it, but then I looked up and realized where the problem was coming from – my eyes and nose were reacting to pollen from the plane trees that line the streets where I live. The first six weeks of spring are like torture now. It's a real pity, because it's the best time of the year, but the only way to avoid the problem is to stay indoors as much as possible.'



Gabby's story

'I'd always been a real chocolate and cheese addict. When I was 19 I was very ill after a meal – I started vomiting and got a terrible headache. The symptoms lasted about 24 hours. Three days later the same thing happened, and this situation went on for about two years. The doctors I went to had no idea what the problem was. Then one day I read an article in the newspaper about food allergies and I realised that I had the same symptoms they were describing. I decided to stop eating some of the foods that can cause migraines, and the problem went away immediately. I found out that I was allergic to cheese, chocolate and red wine.'

A large rectangular area with horizontal blue lines for writing. On the left side, there is a red pencil icon pointing towards the top left corner of the writing area.

EVERYDAY LIFE

EXERCISE 2: NIGHT



Dan's story

'I am allergic to radishes, balloons and the leaves of willow trees. If I eat a radish I get a red rash all over my body and my eyes and lips swell. Balloons just make my face swell up. I found out about my allergy to radish when I first ate one when I was six. I ate another one when I was 10, and the reaction was much more severe. Before I first came into contact with balloons and willow leaves I had no idea I was allergic to them at all. The only action I can take is to avoid contact with them. Also, other unknown things irritate my nose so I can't stop sneezing. This started about three years ago, when I was 17. I take an anti-histamine tablet every day and I use a nasal spray to make my nose less sensitive to irritation. I find that on days when I'm really tired I'm more likely to start sneezing than when I'm not. Also, once I start sneezing I can't stop (unless I'm lucky) until I go to sleep that night.'



Brooke's story

'I've been allergic to dust and pollen since I was a very young child. By the time I was 18 months my eyes watered and my nose ran all the time, and my allergy symptoms sometimes triggered frightening asthma attacks. I'm a university student now, and I've learnt to live with my allergies. I have an air cleaner in my room and dust-mite-proof covers over my mattress and pillows, and I always have a supply of eye drops, nose sprays and antihistamines nearby. My flatmate does the vacuum cleaning regularly, and I wash my hair every day to keep allergens out of it. I've learnt to take medication the moment I get symptoms, and that way I can get out and enjoy life, even in spring.'

A large, blank writing area with horizontal blue lines and a vertical red margin line on the left. A red pencil icon is positioned at the top left corner of the writing area.

EVERYDAY LIFE

EXERCISE 3: ALLERGY VOCABULARY

Match the words on the left with the definitions on the right.

1. allergen
 2. allergy
 3. pollen
 4. dust mite
 5. dust
 6. histamine
 7. antihistamine
 8. hay fever
 9. a rash
 10. swell
 11. itch
 12. sneeze
- a. seeds from plants and trees that float in the air
 - b. a microscopic insect that lives in dust
 - c. the chemical produced by the body and which causes allergic reactions
 - d. a substance that causes an allergic reaction in some people
 - e. medication that stops the body producing histamine
 - f. a hypersensitive reaction to certain substances
 - g. to feel or produce an irritating sensation
 - h. if you don't clean your house, everything is soon covered in this
 - i. to become inflated, grow in size
 - j. to violently and unintentionally expel air through the nose
 - k. a red area on the skin
 - l. an allergic reaction to the seeds from plants and trees

EVERYDAY LIFE

EXERCISE 4: ALLERGY FACT FILE

An allergy is a hypersensitive reaction to substances in the world around us. These substances are called *allergens*. For most people, they don't cause any problems. But in people who suffer from allergies, the body thinks that the allergen is a dangerous invader and produces an antibody called *immunoglobulin E* (IgE for short) that fights the allergen. IgE causes the body to produce a chemical called *histamine*. It is this chemical that causes the symptoms of the allergy: itching, watery eyes, runny nose, sneezing and eczema (inflamed, itchy skin).

What types of allergies are there?

Allergens can be classified into three types, depending on how they get into our body. The most common type are *inhalants*, substances that float in the air and enter the body through the respiratory system. These include pollen from trees and plants, which cause hay fever, and dust. Household dust contains two things that commonly cause allergies: dust mites, which are microscopic insects that feed on human skin cells, and dander, very small flakes of dead animal skin. Next there are *ingestants*, which enter the body through the mouth in food like shellfish, milk, cheese, eggs and peanuts, and drugs like aspirin. Finally, there are *contact allergies*. Here the allergen enters the body through the skin. An example is the reaction some people have to the nickel found in earrings and body studs.

Who gets allergies?

Scientists think that people inherit a tendency to be allergic, although they probably do not have an inherited tendency to be allergic to a specific allergen. Children are much more likely to develop allergies if their parents have allergies, and someone with two allergic parents is more likely to develop an allergy than someone with one allergic parent. Also, if your body is exposed to allergens at certain times when its defences are low, such as after a viral infection or during pregnancy, this can contribute to the development of an allergy. Most people who are allergic to something begin to show symptoms when they are young, although some allergies, like hay fever, can develop later in life.

Are we all too clean?

Allergies are becoming more and more common in wealthy, industrialised nations. Asthma, for example, was

rare only 30 years ago, but today between 20 and 30 per cent of the population in the United States, Japan, western Europe and Australia suffer from it. Scientists believe this is because our habits and lifestyle have changed. We are obsessed with cleanliness and hygiene and spend little time outdoors getting dirty. Our body does not come into contact with germs, and our immune system doesn't learn what is good or bad for us. The consequence of this is that our immune system is starting to attack substances in our body which are not bad for us, causing allergic reactions.

What should you do if you develop an allergy?

Step 1: Find the culprit

The first thing to do is to find out what you are allergic to, so visit a medical professional. The doctor will ask you about the circumstances surrounding your allergic reaction, and may need to carry out an allergy skin test.

Step 2: Avoidance tactics

When you know what is causing the problem, the next step is to avoid the allergen. For seasonal allergies caused by plants and trees, keep windows shut and wash your hair every day to clean out dust and pollen. Keep pets outside or bathe them regularly if they're indoors, and don't let them sleep on your bed. If you are allergic to dust mites, buy special covers for your mattress and pillow – this is where the mites live and breed! – and get someone else to do the dusting and hoovering regularly. If you are allergic to a particular food, it can be difficult to avoid it because very small quantities of the food might appear in meals or products that don't list that food as an ingredient. This is especially true of nuts. Food packaging in the United Kingdom now has to say if it contains nuts, however small the quantity.

Step 3: Medication

There is no cure for an allergy, so if you can't avoid the cause, all you can really do is take medication, such as antihistamines or nasal sprays, to relieve the symptoms. Or you could try immunotherapy – a series of injections that function like a vaccination and can help to reduce allergy symptoms.

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EXERCISE 5: DISCUSSION

Are you *allergic to* anything?

Do you *suffer from* any allergies?

