



“Why am I feeling this way?”

Karen Binkley, MD, FRCPC

Notes on Rebecca

Age: 55
Occupation: Nurse
Presentation: She developed urticaria, cough, wheeze, lightheadedness, nausea and abdominal cramping 20 minutes after breakfast.

- ✓ For breakfast, Rebecca consumed cereal (with no nuts or seeds, but having “added fibre”) with milk.
- ✓ She did not take any medications.
- ✓ She was not exercising and was not exposed to latex.
- ✓ No known food allergies.
- ✓ History of rhinitis in the spring, controlled with intranasal corticosteroids and non-sedating antihistamines.
- ✓ No history of asthma or eczema, but a family history of atopy.
- ✓ She has used surgical latex gloves at work in the past, but a rash or other allergic reaction never developed.
- ✓ Tolerates banana, avocado and kiwi.
- ✓ Did have exacerbation of rhinoconjunctivitis at work in the past when pouring and dispensing medications in a surgical ward.
- ✓ Allergy skin tests performed three months ago were positive for tree pollen and negative for other aero-allergens, including latex.

Past history

- ✓ Unremarkable.

Current medications

- ✓ None, and there are no known drug allergies.

Physical exam

- ✓ Unremarkable.

What do you suspect?

Final diagnosis:

Psyllium allergy, with anaphylaxis due to psyllium in the fibre-enriched cereal.

- ✓ Rebecca presented with typical anaphylaxis after eating a new fibre-added cereal.
- ✓ Common allergens, such as nuts and seeds, were not present and she has previously tolerated these foods.
- ✓ She likely had exposure to airborne psyllium as a result of her occupation; psyllium in powdered form was often dispensed to patients.
- ✓ Pouring psyllium powder in a small room would result in significant airborne concentrations and lead to sensitizations.
- ✓ Occupational exposure to airborne psyllium resulted in allergic rhinoconjunctivitis that worsened at work.
- ✓ Psyllium is added to various cereals in order to increase fibre content.

Management:

- ✓ Modified allergy skin test to psyllium extract is positive.
- ✓ Rebecca is advised on the necessity of strict avoidance of all psyllium-containing foods.
- ✓ She is instructed in the use of auto-injectable adrenaline.

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Upcoming cases

- ✓ **August:** Wegner's granulomatosis
- ✓ **September:** Local anaesthetic allergy or anxiety