

CAN A TICK BITE CAUSE A MEAT ALLERGY?

By Clara Wicoff

Did you know that a bite from the Lone Star tick can cause a rare allergy to red meat and other food products? This allergy is called an alpha-gal allergy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alpha-gal is a sugar molecule found in most mammals.

Symptoms of an alpha-gal allergy may occur 3-8 hours after eating a reactive food. This can include any red meat, other mammal products (including cow's milk), and even some medications that use mammal-derived ingredients. It does not include poultry or fish. Symptoms can include difficulty breathing, dizziness or fainting, a drop in blood pressure, heartburn or indigestion, hives or rash, nausea or vomiting, and severe stomach pain. These symptoms can be life-threatening, so you should seek immediate medical care.

Although this allergy is rare, it can develop at any age. It is usually permanent. As we're spending more time outside, it's important to remember to protect yourself from tick bites. To do this, use insect repellent for ticks when outdoors and always check your clothing for ticks. When you get home, take a shower and check for ticks. Remove any attached ticks immediately.

For more information, please contact Clara Wicoff, Nutrition, Food and Health Extension Agent, at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or by calling 620-365-2242.



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