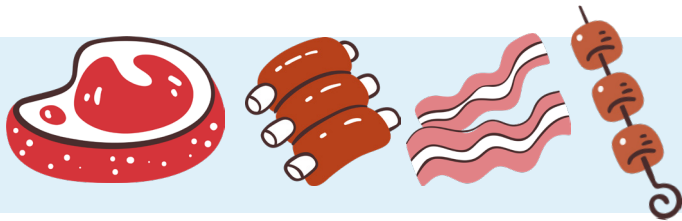
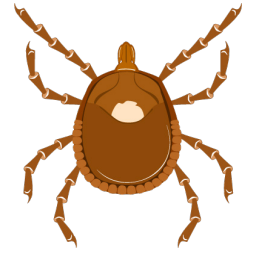


# Alpha-gal Syndrome: *What you need to know*

## What is alpha-gal syndrome?

**Alpha-gal syndrome, or AGS**, is a serious allergy caused by a tick bite. The bite can cause the immune system to react to alpha-gal, a sugar found in most mammals.



**AGS makes you sick 2-6 hours after you eat mammalian meat.**

## How can AGS affect you?

People with AGS may react after eating or using something that contains alpha-gal. Common food triggers include:

- Beef, pork, lamb, venison, and other mammal meat and organ meats
- Lard, broth, gravy, and other mammal-based ingredients
- Dairy products or gelatin for some people

Some medications, vaccines, medical products, cosmetics, toothpaste, and other products may also contain ingredients made from mammals. Most people with AGS do not react to every product or every exposure.

Exercise, alcohol, illness, stress, and some pain medicines, such as NSAIDs, may make a reaction more likely or more severe.

## Know the symptoms

Unlike many food allergies, AGS symptoms are often delayed. They usually begin about two to six hours after eating food that contains alpha-gal. Some medical products may cause a faster reaction.

Symptoms may include:

- Hives, itching, or a rash
- Swelling
- Stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Trouble breathing
- Dizziness, weakness, or fainting
- Low blood pressure
- Anaphylaxis, a life-threatening allergic reaction

Some people have only stomach or digestive symptoms. Because symptoms may begin hours after eating, AGS can sometimes be mistaken for food poisoning or another digestive problem.

## What should you do?

**Get emergency help for a severe reaction.** Use epinephrine right away if it has been prescribed to you, and call 911. Trouble breathing, fainting, severe swelling may be signs of anaphylaxis.

**Talk with a healthcare provider** if you think you may have AGS. A provider or allergist can review your symptoms, discuss possible exposures, and decide whether blood testing is appropriate.

**Prevent more tick bites.** New tick bites may make AGS worse. Use tick repellent, wear protective clothing, check your body for ticks after spending time outdoors, and remove attached ticks immediately.



Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health  
Division of Food Protection  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health



Learn more about  
**Alpha-gal Syndrome at**  
[mass.gov/DPH/AGS](https://mass.gov/DPH/AGS)