



# Survivi

## student life with allergies

Leaving home and starting a new life at university is an exciting time, offering plenty of new experiences. But for those with allergies, how easy is it to cope?

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# Living

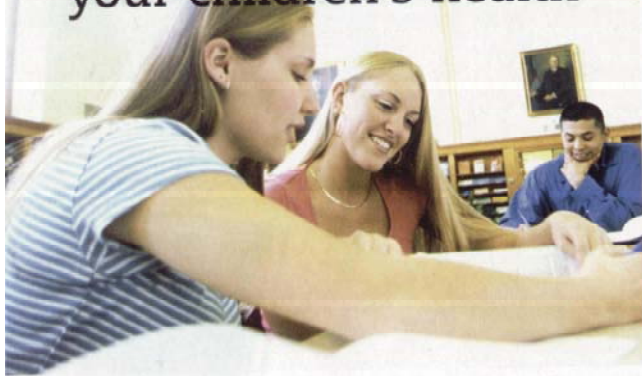
**U**nclean student houses, sharing kitchens with umpteen people and having meals in halls of residence are all common situations for students. Yet for allergy sufferers, they can pose serious health hazards.

In order to get by without problems, it's often necessary to pay extra attention to potential problem areas and develop ways of getting around them. This applies to all students with allergies, and not just those who've had severe reactions, advises David Reading, from the Anaphylaxis Campaign. 'Everyone should take allergies seriously,' he says, 'even if past symptoms have been relatively mild.'

### Living in catered halls of residence

The catering departments of most university halls are willing to make arrangements if you have special dietary requirements – as long as you let them know in advance. 'I'm severely allergic to dairy food,' explained former student Annette Woods, 'and was worried about being in a catered hall.' However, she spoke to the head of catering in advance and they arranged





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to cook a separate dairy-free version for her each day.

'I did feel a bit self-conscious when collecting it,' she admits, 'as they invariably took ages to locate it. But it was great to be able to ensure my meal was completely dairy-free and wouldn't cause me to be ill.'

## House sharing

Sharing a house is second nature for most students, but living conditions often need to be taken into consideration if you've got allergies to contend with. Rachel, a former student who suffers from various allergies, including dust, dairy, pollen and asthma, survived house sharing by ensuring she cleaned the place regularly herself.

In addition, she bought herself a convector-style economy heater and used it in her bedroom to try and heat the room and reduce the mould. 'I did have to pay more electricity,' she says, 'but it helped.'

## Going out and socialising

Socialising and enjoying pubs and clubs is also a big part of student life, but you'll need to take extra care. 'Too much alcohol can affect your judgement, taking you off guard. It can also speed up an allergic reaction,' says David. 'We're not saying you have to be tee total, but be aware of the risks of alcohol.'

Likewise, with eating out it might be necessary to say no to certain places. 'Oriental and Indian foods are risky for nut allergy sufferers, as nuts are used liberally as an ingredient, so they're best avoided,' says David.

By being aware of your allergies, taking any necessary precautions and using your own self-help strategies, student life shouldn't be too difficult and you can enjoy it just as much as anyone else.

# 6 SURVIVAL TIPS

- 1 Don't suffer in silence. Tell others about your allergy, particularly if you've ever had a serious reaction.
- 2 Ask for help from your university if you need it. When it comes to meals or accommodation in halls, they're usually willing to do what they can.
- 3 Make an emergency plan, just in case you have a bad reaction. Write it down and let friends know about it in case they have to act quickly to help you.
- 4 Be sensible. Don't get carried away with student life and ignore your allergies.
- 5 Be aware that alcohol could affect your judgement.
- 6 Don't be afraid to say no to takeaways or meals out at places that could prove risky.

## CASE STUDY

### 'The house was very damp and gave me lots of headaches'

Twenty-five-year-old Femke de Vos Burchart had to face new allergies in addition to her existing ones when she started university.

'I'd had hayfever since I was 15, but it wasn't until I was 19 and at university in Holland that my dust allergy and asthma were officially recognised.'

As part of her drama degree, Femke spent a year at Hull University. It was there that she experienced extra problems. 'My asthma was really bad when I was at Hull,' she says. 'The house I was living in was very damp and I had lots of headaches.' She went to see a doctor and he thought the problem was due to sinusitis, so prescribed antibiotics. However, they didn't work.

Realising she couldn't continue living in a house that seemed to be exacerbating her allergies, Femke sought help from another doctor. 'I went to my parents' GP and he told me it was the damp that was making my asthma worse.' He wrote a note for her to take back to the head leasing office. They were very understanding and the landlord agreed to install an air circulation system in the house. 'The air circulation system worked a treat,' says Femke, 'and my headaches went away.'

As far as advice for other students goes, her top tip for those having difficulties with their accommodation is to let people know the situation and not suffer in silence, as often help can be provided. ■