



## **Immunotherapy (Allergy shots)**

Immunotherapy is one of the major breakthroughs in modern allergy treatment. It can be referred to as desensitization, hypo-sensitization, or just "allergy shots".

In the immunotherapy process, a series of injections is given in gradually increasing doses of allergen extracts. Only the specific substances to which a patient tested allergic are included in the extract mix. These include, most commonly, weed, grass, and tree pollens, and dust mites. Each shot given has a slightly higher dose than the preceding, until a "maintenance" level is reached. This higher maintenance dose is continued for a period of time - generally one to three years - as allergy symptoms decrease.

Partial to complete relief is experienced in about two-thirds of patients. The relief can last several years after the allergy shots are ceased. In many cases the relief is very long term, especially in children.

A patient who embarks on this therapy should make the commitment to see it through. When starting immunotherapy, you will need to go to your healthcare provider once or twice a week for several months. The dose is increased each time until the maintenance dose is reached. If the shots are effective, you will go to your healthcare provider every 2 to 4 weeks for 2 to 5 more years. You may become less sensitive to allergens during this time, and your allergy symptoms should become milder and may even go away completely.

Immunotherapy can be expensive, but it is covered by most insurances. It is important to also compare how much you spend in the course of a year on antihistamines, decongestants, and analgesics to obtain relief. Then consider time missed from work or school and how much leisure time is spent uncomfortable all because of allergy symptoms.

The first step is to determine your allergic response to a panel of allergens with "allergy skin testing". After allergy testing our providers will discuss the risks and benefits of immunotherapy if it is indicated.

### **How Should I Prepare for Allergy Shots?**

For two hours before and after your appointment, do not exercise or engage in vigorous activity. Exercise may stimulate increased blood flow to the tissues and promote faster release of antigens into the bloodstream.

Tell your provider about all the medications you are taking. Some medications, such as beta blockers, can interfere with the treatment and/or increase the risk of side effects. You may have to stop allergy shots if you are taking these medications.

Talk to your provider about the safety of continuing the allergy shots if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

### **What Should I Expect After Allergy Shots?**

Usually, you will be monitored for about 30 minutes after receiving an allergy shot to make sure that you don't develop side effects such as itchy eyes, shortness of breath, runny nose, or tight throat. If you develop these symptoms after you leave the doctor's office, take an antihistamine and go back to your doctor's office or go to the nearest emergency room. While serious adverse reactions are rare, you will carry an EpiPen for emergency use until you can get medical care.

Redness, swelling, or irritation within one inch of the site of the injection is normal. These symptoms should go away within 4 to 8 hours after receiving the shot.