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PATIENT GUIDE TO ALLERGEN IMMUNOTHERAPY

What is Allergen Immunotherapy?

Allergen immunotherapy, commonly known as allergy shots, is a treatment form that aims to decrease your sensitivity to allergens in the environment. You were identified to have allergic sensitizations by the skin and/or blood testing. Immunotherapy works like a vaccination against these allergens and helps minimize and/or prevent allergy symptoms. Immunotherapy is very effective in the treatment of allergic rhinitis, allergic asthma, and insect sting allergy.

How does Immunotherapy work?

You will be given incrementally increasing doses of the highly purified allergens that you are allergic to. This stimulates a change in your immune system. Over time you will become less sensitive and experience fewer or no allergy symptoms to that particular allergen.

What is involved in Immunotherapy?

After your allergy triggers have been identified by testing, your doctor will make an allergy vaccine that is specific for you, based upon your sensitivities. You may require 1, 2, or 3 vaccine vials depending upon the number and types of allergens that you are allergic to.

You will start receiving minute quantities of the allergen. You will then receive increasing amounts until you reach your "maintenance dose." There are two phases of immunotherapy:

Build-up phase: You will receive allergy injections once or twice a week with increasing amounts of allergen. You will progress through different concentrated vials (green, blue, yellow, red) until you reach the strongest and maximum dose tolerated. This will be your maintenance dose. It typically takes 4-6 months to reach this dose.

Maintenance phase: A dose of 0.5cc of allergen vaccine from the red vial is typically called the maintenance dose. Not all people, however, will progress to this dose. If needed, your doctor will make adjustments and determine your optimal maintenance dose. Once you reach your maintenance dose, the interval between shots will be gradually increased (from weekly, then every 2, 3, or 4 weeks).

When should I see improvement?

Initial improvement may be noted in a few months after starting, but it may take as much as a year at times. Symptoms will improve gradually with continued treatment. Because immunotherapy does not provide immediate relief of symptoms, you will need to continue your allergy medications, especially during the build-up phase. The ultimate goal is for you to have fewer to no symptoms and to be able to come off your allergy medications.

How long do I stay on Immunotherapy?

It is recommended that you stay on allergy injections for 5 years. Some people will experience long-lasting relief from their allergy symptoms. Other may find that their symptoms have gradually returned. The decision to stop immunotherapy will therefore need to be individualized with your doctor.

What kinds of Reactions occur with Immunotherapy?

The most common allergy shot reaction is a local reaction. You may develop itching, redness, or swelling at the injection site. This can occur immediately or several hours after receiving an injection. If this type of reaction occurs, please notify your nurse prior to your next injection. Recommendations to reduce these types of reactions may include the use of allergy medications and/ or dose adjustments.

Systemic reactions are much less common than local reactions but are more serious in nature. They can cause an increase in allergy symptoms such as sneezing, nasal congestion, or even hives. Rarely, a serious systemic allergic reaction or anaphylaxis can occur. Symptoms can include swelling of the throat, wheezing, chest tightness, nausea, dizziness, or others. In very rare instances, anaphylactic reactions can be fatal.

Because of possible reactions to immunotherapy, **it is absolutely mandatory that all allergy injections will be given in our office**, under the supervision of qualified medical providers. **You are required to wait at least 30 minutes following your injection** to ensure that there is no significant adverse reaction. If you experience any itching, swelling, tightness in the throat or chest, hives, etc, you should notify the shot nurse immediately so you can receive prompt care. If a systemic reaction occurs after you leave the office, you should go to the nearest emergency medical facility.

Expectations from Immunotherapy

In over 85% of cases, immunotherapy can provide significant and long-lasting improvement in allergy symptoms. You will experience fewer and less severe allergic reactions to those allergens that currently cause your allergies or asthma to flare up. You will also be able to control your symptoms with less medicine than you currently need.

CONSENT FOR TREATMENT WITH ALLERGY INJECTIONS

The staff of Advanced Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology have explained to me that the purpose of allergen immunotherapy (or allergy shots) is to reduce a patient's sensitivity to specific allergens by administration of those allergens in a controlled way. I understand the importance of environmental control measures, avoidance, and the use of medications. I understand that a perfect outcome cannot be guaranteed.

I understand that immunotherapy should be administered in a medical facility with the presence of a health care provider. I understand that there are risks from allergy injections, which may include: rash, itchy eyes, nasal or sinus congestion, headache, dizziness, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, flushing, generalized itching or hives, nausea, or rarely anaphylaxis. Despite all precautions, occasional reactions may occur and be serious, even life-threatening. **For that reason, I understand that I am required to wait in the office for at least 30 minutes after each injection.**

I understand that reactions to injections can start more than 30 minutes after administration of the injection. I will immediately notify the office if I experience symptoms after I have left the office.

I understand that the majority of serious systemic reactions occur in patients with asthma who are having increased asthma symptoms. If I have asthma, I understand that it is important for me to notify the nurse if I have been having increased asthma symptoms (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, or requiring my rescue inhalers more frequently).

I understand that certain prescription medications for high blood pressure, headaches, or eye problems contain beta-blockers. These medications can significantly increase the chance of worsening an adverse reaction to allergy injections. Therefore, I agree to notify the staff if I have been prescribed these or any new medications.

I agree to notify the office if I become pregnant during treatment with immunotherapy.

Minor patients must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to receive allergy injections unless the appropriate minor consent form has been signed by the parent or guardian.

I have read and fully understand this consent for treatment form. I have been provided with the opportunity to ask questions and the potential risks of immunotherapy. I consent to treatment with allergen immunotherapy.