



# MEDICAL ASSOCIATES

C L I N I C

## Department of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

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## ALLERGY IMMUNOTHERAPY: A GUIDE FOR PATIENT EDUCATION

### INTRODUCTION

Allergy immunotherapy injections or “allergy shots” are prescribed for patients with allergic rhinitis “hay fever”, allergic asthma, or life threatening reactions to insect stings. The purpose is to decrease your sensitivity to allergy-causing substances so that exposures will result in fewer symptoms.

### ALLERGY IMMUNOTHERAPY OFFERS SEVERAL ADVANTAGES

- 1) It is the only type of allergy treatment that can potentially alter your response to dust mites, pollens, animal dander, mold or venom. Medications, although effective for the control of your symptoms, have no long-lasting benefit.
- 2) Immunotherapy is especially useful if you have symptoms during most or all of the year because you are allergic to multiple allergens; e.g. trees, pollen, molds, grasses, and ragweed.
- 3) Allergy injection therapy is very effective for hay fever and also asthma that is due primarily to inhaled allergen. About 80-90% of those with hay fever will improve with allergy shots. The degree of benefit varies with each individual. “Cures” should not be expected; rather the intent is to modify symptoms during times of typical exposure, making them tolerable.

### PROCEDURE

Allergy extract will be formulated specifically for you containing those allergens to which you are allergic. Allergy injections start at a low dose and are gradually increased until a therapeutic dose is reached, also called a maintenance dose.

Initially, your injections should be given 1-2 times per week. Increases in the dose of extract will continue until you reach your maintenance dose. The maintenance dose is usually attained 5-7 months after initiating treatment. At that point, you will continue injections at intervals every 3-4 weeks. After 4-5 years, we will consider stopping your injections. After the shots are discontinued, the duration of benefits will vary from one individual to another.

### THERE ARE A FEW DISADVANTAGES TO ALLERGY INJECTION THERAPY

- 1) It is somewhat cumbersome and time-consuming during the first year of therapy.
- 2) Although shots may reduce your symptoms, they will probably not be totally eliminated.
- 3) Improvement in symptoms is not usually seen for at least six months, and maximal benefit in 1-2 years.
- 4) Side effects are very uncommon. There is always the possibility of experiencing an allergic reaction soon after an injection. The most common reaction is a local area of redness and/or swelling may result at the site of the injection. If the swelling is greater than a 50 cent piece and lasts >24 hours, inform your physician. Rarely, a generalized reaction such as generalized itching, hives, sneezing, chest congestion, wheezing or even fainting may occur. Reactions, though unusual, can be serious and rarely fatal. **We insist that you remain in your physician’s office for 30 minutes after each injection.** A serious reaction can be averted by immediate treatment.

## **IMPORTANT POINTS DURING TREATMENT**

- 1) Medications for asthma or medical problems may be taken as usual on the day of an injection.
- 2) Omit injections when you have a fever of more than 100°F, a flare-up of asthma, or an unusual amount of wheezing.
- 3) **Strenuous activity must be avoided for at least one hour after an injection** such as bicycle riding, running, or lifting weights. Failure to do this may result in a systemic reaction.
- 4) **Please inform your physician if you become pregnant while receiving allergy shots.**
- 5) Large localized or generalized reactions always require a dosage adjustment. Please inform your physician if you should experience such a reaction after an injection.
- 6) **Allergy extracts should be kept refrigerated.** However, your extracts have been “stabilized” and brief periods of room temperature during injections are acceptable.
- 7) **It is important to maintain shots at the proper time interval.** An adjustment in the dose of vaccine may be necessary for long lapses in injections.
- 8) We would like to suggest that you keep this information sheet for “ready reference.”

## **FOLLOW-UP VISITS**

Follow-up visits are necessary to assess your progress and to determine if modifications in your treatment plan would be helpful.

Since every individual responds to therapy in an individual manner, these visits are important.

## **SHOT HOURS**

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Tuesday: 7:30 am - 6:00 pm

Friday: 8:00 am – 11:30 am; afternoon by appointment only

## **FEES**

There is a fee for the allergy extracts. In addition, there is a fee each time an injection is given at the office. In the event of an allergic reaction, you will be responsible for any additional costs associated with treatment.

## **IN SUMMARY**

- 1) Wait in your physician’s office for 30 minutes after each injection.
- 2) Avoid strenuous exercise for at least one hour after each injection.
- 3) Inform your physician of any large local or generalized reaction.
- 4) Inform your physician if you become pregnant.
- 5) Patience is the key to successful therapy. Injection therapy does not reach its full potential for about one to two years.