

ASTHMA ALLERGY AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY

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SUCCESSFUL IMMUNOTHERAPY (Allergy Shots)

Three approaches are used in treating allergies: 1) Avoidance of the allergen (what you are allergic to), 2) immunotherapy (allergy shots), and 3) medication to relieve symptoms. Basic treatment is still avoiding those things that cause your allergies. Such allergens as animals and feathers can easily be avoided; while dust and molds are harder to avoid, steps can be taken to reduce their levels in the home. When an allergen cannot be avoided or when symptoms are severe, immunotherapy may be recommended. Immunotherapy consists of a series of injections (allergy shots). The allergy extracts used in these injections contain small amounts of the things to which you are allergic. The strength of the extracts is gradually increased until you lose sensitivity to the allergen(s) and your symptoms should improve or even disappear. Immunotherapy works best for the allergens you breathe such as pollens and house dust. It is not useful for food allergies.

REACHING IDEAL MAINTENANCE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

The extract schedule for injections and the amount of extract to be given vary from patient to patient. Our dosage schedule takes approximately four months of increasing weekly injections to reach maintenance. Once maintenance is reached, most patients are able to take one shot per month of the maintenance dose. Ideal maintenance is obtained when relief of allergies occurs during a time you normally have allergy symptoms. This may take several years. The average length of time a patient is on allergy shots is five years. Some patients will have a return of symptoms when shots are stopped, but taking them for several years minimizes the chance that this will happen.

OUR POLICY FOR IMMUNOTHERAPY (ALLERGY SHOTS)

All injections must be given under the supervision of a doctor. You will be instructed to stay in the office for 30 minutes after the shot to make sure there is no reaction. Most allergic reactions will occur in that amount of time. Early signs of a reaction include itching of the neck and palms and a feeling of uneasiness. Fortunately, reactions are rare. When they do happen, they can be brought under control quickly with medication. More commonly, slight swelling may occur where the shot was given, but this usually goes away in a few hours.

YOUR ROLE IN SUCCESSFUL IMMUNOTHERAPY

Again, reaching maintenance requires weekly injections for approximately four months. **You will be instructed to remain in the office for 30 minutes after each shot.** If the regularly scheduled injections are missed, you may need to go to a lower dose and work back up to maintenance. You will also be instructed to take an antihistamine the day of your shot.

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Although the chance of serious side effects with allergy shots is low, you must be aware of the following types of reactions and **REPORT ALL EXCEPT LOCAL REACTIONS TO THE OFFICE IMMEDIATELY:**

LOCAL REACTION: Redness and swelling at the site of injection that persists for 12-24 hours. This can be treated with an ice pack and/or antihistamines.

MILD SYSTEMIC (BODY-WIDE) REACTION: Stuffy nose, swelling of the eyes, or a few scattered hives. This can be treated with antihistamines and holding your next injection at the same dose or lowering the dose one step.

MODERATE SYSTEMIC (BODY-WIDE) REACTION: Many hives, bothersome stuffy nose or swollen eyes. This is also treated with antihistamines and dropping your next injection to a lower dose.

SEVERE SYSTEMIC (BODY-WIDE) REACTION: Difficulty breathing or swallowing, severe hives, dizziness or feeling faint, collapsing, or even death. Epinephrine and resuscitative measures (IV's, oxygen, etc.) are required to treat this reaction. If you experience a severe reaction, you will be required to meet with the Doctor prior to your next shot.

When taking allergy shots, it is required to have periodic checkups with the doctor (at least yearly). After your yearly checkup, fresh allergy extract will be made and because it is stronger than the year-old extract, you will need to come for at least three weekly shots before going back on monthly maintenance. Please keep us informed of any current or new medications that are prescribed for you while you are taking allergy shots, especially for high blood pressure.

Until the shots become effective, or if shots are not desired, medications are given to control allergy symptoms. These, of course, are only temporary and will not get rid of, or cure the allergy. Reduced need for medication, increased ability to be physically active, and ability to be exposed to your allergens with fewer symptoms are welcome signs of successful immunotherapy.

I have read and understand the policy for "Successful Immunotherapy." I understand that I am expected to wait in the office for 30 minutes after every shot, because of potential for adverse reaction to my shot.

Patient signature: _____

Date: _____