

IMMUNOTHERAPY

General Information about Allergy Injections

The following information is for patients who may be considering immunotherapy (allergy shots or injections) as part of their allergy treatment plan.

The goal of immunotherapy is to reduce allergic sensitivities. Treatment involves a series of injections given on a regular weekly or bi-weekly basis during the initial build-up period. The kinds of allergy injections prescribed, as well as the number and frequency of the injections, will be described in a discussion with either Dr. Baswell or Dr. Caplan. The prescription is based on your particular symptoms, your examination and your test results. Allergy injections are started at a low dosage. The strength and amount of the injections are gradually increased over a period of months, until you reach the highest dosage that has been prescribed by your doctor or a level above which there is a reaction. You'll then continue "maintenance" injections at this level. The best maintenance dosage for an individual is one that achieves relief of symptoms without unpleasant side effects. Improvement of allergy symptoms will be gradual. About 85% to 90% of patients given allergy injections receive significant reduction in their allergic symptoms. However, improvements usually occur over a period of three to six months. The maximum benefit may not be reached until 12 to 24 months into treatment. The duration of immunotherapy treatment varies greatly. The minimum treatment period for most patients is three to five years, but in many cases longer periods of treatment are beneficial or necessary. In general, the injections should be continued until about one year beyond the time when allergic symptoms have come under control. Thus, the total duration of treatment has to be individualized. The duration depends on the nature of the allergic problem, the rate and completeness of recovery, and whether symptoms return when immunotherapy is discontinued.

Because allergy injections are extracts of substances to which you are allergic, you and your doctor will need to be alert to any signs that you are having an allergic reaction to the injection. Early indications of a reaction are described in the accompanying *Immunotherapy: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers* and the *Consent for Administration of Allergy Injections*. You will be asked to read and sign the consent before beginning your immunotherapy. If you begin to develop local swelling (greater than two inches) at the injection site or have any other symptoms that you feel are due to the injection, *please contact us before your next injection* so that we may adjust the dosage.

Allergy injections should be given under the direct supervision of a physician, so that the physician can monitor potential problems and treat any reactions. If your injections are to be given somewhere other than in our office or clinic, we must have the name, address and telephone number of the physician who will assume the responsibility for administering your injections. We will provide you with a form to complete that will allow us to forward your extracts to another physician or medical facility. Allergenic extracts will be released **only to a licensed physician**. After completing the initial series of injections, immunotherapy follow-up visits remain very important. At those visits, if your allergic symptoms are not clearly improving, Dr Baswell or Dr. Caplan may make changes in your prescription to make it more effective for you. It is important for patients who are experiencing persistent allergic problems to have regular re-evaluations. Patients who are doing well, who are having no problems with their injections, and who have not developed any new medical problems should plan on a review of their treatment program with the doctor once a year.