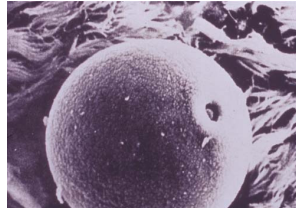




Dust Mites

SKIN TESTING & IMMUNOTHERAPY



Pollens



Cat Dander

Immunotherapy is one treatment option for people with **allergies or allergy-induced asthma**. Ideally, it's better to avoid the allergens that trigger your allergy or asthma but this isn't always possible or practical. Medication treatment is generally efficient, yet for some, medications lose effectiveness over time. Immunotherapy or allergy shots can be used to reduce allergy symptoms and an allergist-immunologist is the most qualified to provide this treatment option.

Allergy Shots are proven to work against **some allergens** including grass, tree and ragweed pollens, dust mites, cat dander, some molds and stinging insects. They are not used for food allergies. At this time, immunotherapy is the only treatment with the potential to provide long-term prevention of allergic asthma or allergic rhinitis symptoms. As with any treatment, results vary with the individual patient and not all patients are good candidates for shot treatments. Only your physician can decide.

What makes a good candidate? Patients with perennial (year round) or seasonal allergies; patients who use several medications to control their symptoms and these (Cromolyn sodium nasal sprays, topical intranasal corticosteroids or antihistamines) aren't working; young children, due to the potential for long term benefits; patients who can tolerate epinephrine – arrhythmia or other heart problems might disqualify you for Immunotherapy, as will taking some beta blocker medications. (Sometimes there may be severe reactions during immunotherapy requiring epinephrine so the patient must be able to tolerate the drug). If your doctor decides you're a good candidate, what's next?

Skin Testing. This is the most common, accurate and cost effective procedure to determine your allergens. Most patients are tested for allergens known to be prevalent in the area you live, so the total number tested can vary from a few to more than 50 although there are hundreds of potential allergens. Skin tests vary by ease of use, patient discomfort level, time needed to conduct them, accuracy and replication. There are 2 basic types of testing procedures:

- Prick test - a drop of the antigen is first placed on the skin, then a sharp needle or pin is used to puncture the top layer of skin
- Intradermal testing – a small amount of antigen (allergen) is injected into the dermis which is the skin layer just below the top of the skin surface

Within 15 minutes after the injections, if you're allergic to the substance or antigen, redness, swelling and itching occurs. The larger these "wheals" (raised areas like a welt) the more sensitive you are. Once allergens are identified, Immunotherapy or Allergy Shots can begin. One generally will receive an injection of your allergens 1-2 times a week for the first 4-6 months (build-up phase). This is the typical time it takes to reach a maintenance level. Injection of minute amounts of your allergen allows the immune system to become more tolerant or desensitized to that allergen. After this, bi-monthly to monthly maintenance doses keep your resistance level steady. Most people will see improvement once they reach maintenance level allergy injections. If not, reevaluate immunotherapy with your doctor. Treatment can continue for 3 to 5 years. A faster method, Rush Immunotherapy, is an accelerated version and offers control in weeks rather than months. Speak to your specialist for the best treatment for you.

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