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Advice From Your Allergist on Allergy Shots (Allergy Immunotherapy)

You can have a life without allergies!

Allergy treatments include prevention, medicine, and allergy shots (immunotherapy). Allergy shots may be recommended if avoiding the causes of your allergies or taking medicine does not control your symptoms.

Your allergist will help you identify the causes of your allergies. When combined with a detailed medical history, allergy testing can help find the specific cause of your allergic reactions. Skin tests or blood allergy tests are convenient and accurate. However, skin tests are usually more comprehensive.

Allergy tests should be performed by allergists, who are specialists trained in the best methods for allergy testing and treating allergic conditions.

What if prevention and medicine don't work?

You may be able to avoid the causes or "triggers" of your symptoms once they are identified. Some triggers, such as pollens, molds and dust mites, are difficult to avoid. Your allergist can recommend specific ways to reduce your exposure at home.

Medicines may also be used to reduce allergy symptoms and improve the way you feel. New medicines for allergic diseases, including asthma, have fewer side effects than the old medicines.

If allergy avoidance and medicines don't control your symptoms, your allergist may recommend allergy shots.

Are allergy shots right for me?

Allergy shots help your body build its natural resistance to the effects of pollens, dust mites, mold spores, animal dander and insect venom.

It is the only treatment currently available that changes the immune system and prevents new allergies and asthma. Research shows allergy shots reduce health care use and costs from prescription medicine use, office visits, and hospitalization.

You may benefit from allergy shots if you:

- Have side effects from allergy medicines
- Have allergy triggers that you cannot avoid
- Want a better solution to your allergy problem

Allergy shots are also effective in the treatment of allergic asthma. They can help relieve allergic reactions that trigger asthma symptoms. Over time, they can help your breathing and decrease the need for asthma medicines. Allergy shots might benefit some patients with eczema or atopic dermatitis, when the condition is associated with other allergies.

Used since 1911, allergy shots stimulate your immune system to fight allergies safely, effectively and naturally. Most children and adults can be candidates for allergy shots. Pregnant patients can continue treatment started before pregnancy.

After starting your allergy shots, fewer medicines may be needed over time. Work or school days are

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no longer missed. The burden of allergies will be lifted. Allergies will become something you don't think about any more.

How are allergy shots given?

Allergy shots are prescribed by an allergist. They are always given under medical supervision where doctors, physician assistants and nurses are available to handle any possible reactions.

Treatment involves injections of small amounts of purified allergy "extracts" into the skin. The extracts are made from the substances causing your reactions, such as pollens, mold spores, animal dander, dust mites or insect venom. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved allergy shots for use as injections only.

Allergy shots begin with small doses and increase gradually. Therapy continues until a maintenance level is achieved. Shot intervals vary from once or twice a week to as long as once every six weeks.

Immunity does not occur immediately. Some patients begin to feel better quickly. Most patients continue to receive monthly injections for three to five years once they reach their maintenance dose.

In some patients, immunity is maintained and treatment can be stopped after several years. For others, treatment may be needed for longer periods of time. Generally, the benefits of allergy shots can last for many years, or even a lifetime.

What are the risks of immunotherapy?

Although rare, serious reactions can occur because treatment involves shots that contain substances to which you are allergic.

The most common problem is a red, itchy bump at the injection site. Sometimes a similar reaction can occur six to twenty-four hours later.

Sometimes there are more severe reactions that include itching all over the body, chest tightness or wheezing. Allergy shots must be given under supervision where medical staff and medicines are available to handle serious reactions.

Allergists believe the benefits of allergy shots far outweigh the extremely small risk of a serious reaction for most people.

What are "cluster," "rush" and "rapid" immunotherapy treatments?

Allergists may use faster schedules known as "cluster," "rush" or "rapid" immunotherapy. These treatments offer patients more flexibility and faster results. The faster schedules may appeal to patients who cannot commit to weekly allergy shots for five or six months. These are safe and effective options, and the schedule of the injections may vary. Rush and rapid immunotherapy usually involves getting multiple injections two or three days in a row. Cluster immunotherapy is used to help reach a point where you no longer react to the allergens in a few weeks. Patients are given two to four injections every 30 minutes, one day each week, for three weeks in a row.

Get tested! Get treated! Get better!



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Board-certified allergists are specialists in diagnosing and treating allergies and asthma.

