



Immunotherapy Treatments for Allergies

What You Need to Know About Allergy Shots and Tablets

Unlike medications to treat symptoms, immunotherapy works similarly to vaccines – desensitizing your immune system to allergens over time. Immunotherapy has more than 100 years of safety and effectiveness research behind it.

You may be a good candidate for immunotherapy if:

- You struggle with side effects from allergy medicines.
- You have trouble avoiding your allergy triggers.
- You seek a more comprehensive solution.

While [allergy immunotherapy](#) requires time and patience, the payoff can be long-term symptom relief.

How Immunotherapy Works

All types of immunotherapy treatments for allergies work the same way. Over time, you are exposed to increased amounts of an allergen. The idea is that eventually, your immune system learns to adapt to the allergen,

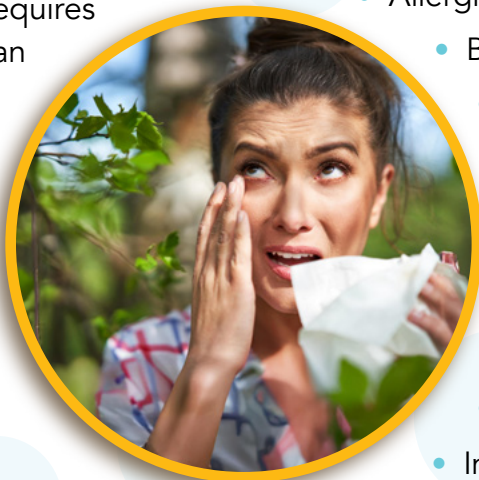
which reduces or eliminates the allergic reaction and its symptoms.

Allergy Testing

Before receiving immunotherapy, your allergist will do an allergy test to determine what substances you are allergic to. Depending on your body's response, your treatment may be geared to one or more of those specific substances, and you'll gradually become less reactive to them.

Types of allergies treated with immunotherapy:

- Allergic rhino-conjunctivitis (hay fever)
- Allergic otitis media (ear infection)
- Bronchial asthma
- Pollens from grass, trees and weeds
- Mold
- Pet dander (cat and dog allergies)
- Dust mites
- Cockroach and mice
- Insect stings
- Peanut





Types of Immunotherapies

Allergy Shots

(Subcutaneous Immunotherapy, SCIT)

Allergy shots are the most used and most effective form of immunotherapy approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Your allergist prepares a personalized mixture of allergens to which you are allergic and administers the injection in their office. In what's known as the "build up phase," the concentration of the allergen in the mixture is gradually increased. Less frequent injections are needed in the "maintenance phase" after an effective dose is reached.

Did you know?

Studies show that 85% of people who suffer from hay fever see a reduction in their symptoms when they receive allergy shots.

Patients receiving allergy shots are closely monitored during and after each injection to ensure their safety. The risk of severe reactions is low, and the potential benefits in terms of allergy symptom reduction and improved quality of life often outweigh the risks.

Allergy Tablets

(Sublingual Immunotherapy, SLIT)

In 2014, the FDA approved an alternative form of immunotherapy that does not require needles or injections. Sublingual immunotherapy tablets are placed under the tongue for one to two minutes and then swallowed as they dissolve.

They can be taken seasonally at home or even when traveling to reduce allergy symptoms using a build-up phase and maintenance phase. Examples include:

- Dust mite oral extract (Odactra)
- Timothy grass pollen sublingual extract (Grastek)
- Grass pollen sublingual extract (Oralair)
- Short ragweed pollen sublingual extract (Ragwitek)

Allergy tablets do not have the same long-term benefits as allergy shots, but they also do not carry a risk of severe reactions like anaphylaxis. Possible side effects include itching or burning in the mouth, nausea, belly pain, and diarrhea. Discuss any concerns or side effects with your allergist, who can adjust the treatment plan as needed to minimize any adverse reactions.

What about allergy drops?

Allergy drops are another form of SLIT; however, they are not FDA-approved, and their use is considered off-label in the United States.

Food Allergy (Oral Immunotherapy, OIT)

In 2020, the FDA approved Palforzia [Peanut (Arachis hypogaea) Allergen Powder, a long-term oral immunotherapy shown to reduce the severity of allergic reactions to peanuts. Children with a diagnosed peanut allergy, ages 4 through 17, can receive a tiny amount of the powder and then gradually larger amounts to help their body become desensitized to the food. Other allergens, including egg and milk, are being studied for OIT.



Frequency of Treatment

Immunotherapy is a commitment. How often you receive treatments varies based on your allergist's approach, your personal preference, and the type of immunotherapy you'll receive.

- **For allergy shots:** You typically receive weekly injections (sometimes more often) for about seven months, after which injections can be administered every two weeks. Eventually, in the maintenance phase, injections can be given every month or two for the next three to five years.
- **For allergy tablets:** You may take allergy tablets three days a week or up to every day for three to five years, with some types taken seasonally based on the type you receive.



- Uncontrolled asthma
- Cancer
- Beta-blocker medication such as Lopressor (metoprolol)

To learn more about allergy management, visit acaai.org.

Comparing Treatment Options

Talk with your allergist about how your allergy symptoms affect your activities and health, and consider whether immunotherapy might help. The table below will help you better understand your options when you speak with your allergist.

	Shots	Tablets
Efficacy in reducing symptoms	Very good	Fair/good
Location given	Allergist's office	Home
FDA approved	Yes	Yes
Long-term benefits	Yes	No
Times of year used	Perennial (whole year)	Seasonal or Perennial
Side effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local reactions on arms possible. • Systemic reactions uncommon (0.1% chance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itchy mouth and throat possible. • Systemic reactions very uncommon

Reasons why you may need to avoid immunotherapy:

- Pregnancy
- Age (may not be recommended for under 5 or over 65, although it can vary)

Find an allergist. Find relief.

The best way to take control of your allergies is to speak with an [allergist](#). They have specialized training and experience to determine which allergens are causing your symptoms and can discuss if allergy immunotherapy is right for you.

When should I see an allergist?

See an allergist if you have any of these conditions. Allergists treat two of the nation's most common health problems – allergies and asthma. More than 50 million people in the United States have these allergic diseases. Although symptoms may not always be severe, allergies and asthma are serious and should be treated that way. Many people with these diseases don't realize how much better they can feel. Allergists also treat conditions with similar symptoms, such as non-allergic rhinitis.

What is an allergist?

An allergist is trained to find the source of your symptoms, treat it and help you feel healthy. Life's too short to struggle with allergies or asthma. An allergist can help you find the answers you're looking for.

After earning a medical degree, the doctor completes a three-year residency training program in either internal medicine or pediatrics. They then finish two or three more years of study in asthma, allergy and immunology. The best way to manage your allergies or asthma is to see an allergist.