



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

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## **ALLERGY SHOTS (IMMUNOTHERAPY)**

### **What is immunotherapy?**

Immunotherapy is a treatment used to relieve allergy symptoms of hay fever or allergic asthma by administering injections of substances such as pollen, molds, animal dander, or insects to which an individual has been found to be allergic by skin testing.

### **Some Benefits of Allergy Injections**

- Proven effective in patients with allergic rhinitis (Hay fever), allergic asthma and stinging insect allergy
- Reduction in number of upper respiratory infections that require antibiotics
- Reduction in use of medications to control your allergies
- Improved quality of life compared to standard medical therapy
- Recent studies indicate immunotherapy may delay or prevent the onset of childhood asthma
- Most patients experience significant benefit after 3-6 months of therapy
- More convenient than daily medication to control symptoms
- More cost effective in long run compared to daily medication use
- In patients allergic to stinging insects, immunotherapy can reduce risk of severe allergic reaction with a repeat sting from 60% to less than 5%

### **Some Drawbacks or Risks of Allergy Injections**

- Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) from receiving immunotherapy
- Not a “quick fix” – usually takes 3-6 months to experience benefit
- May not be covered fully by all insurance companies
- Requires frequent visits to reach standard effective dose
- Still requires patient to continue medication during build up phase

### **How are injections given and for how long?**

Typically allergy injections are given once or twice a week until a predetermined target or “maintenance” dose is achieved. This usually takes 3-6 months (approximately 25 injections). Injections are usually continued for 4-5 years of maintenance therapy. At that time, you and your doctor will make a decision about whether to gradually taper your shots or to continue the injections longer.

### **Reactions to immunotherapy**

Local reactions (swelling, itching or tenderness at the injection site) may occur in some patients and usually subside in a day or less. Large local reactions and generalized (systemic) reactions may occur in 1-5 % of patients receiving allergy injections and usually occur in the build up phase, although they can occur at anytime during the course of the treatment. These reactions necessitate a dosage adjustment. These generalized reactions may consist of any or all of the following symptoms:

- Hives, itchy eyes, nose or throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing
- Tightness in the chest and or throat, coughing and or wheezing
- Nauseas and vomiting, abdominal cramps
- Lightheadedness or faintness and sometimes shock

### **Treatment of reactions**

Simple local reactions that consist of: swelling of the arm, redness or tenderness at the site of the injection are best handled with simple measures such as local cold compress or use of medications such as an antihistamine. For systemic reactions adrenaline (epinephrine) is usually given to counteract the reaction. Severe reactions are treated with various methods and may include hospitalizations or emergency room visits. If you experience a generalized reaction after leaving our office, please return to the office or proceed to the nearest emergency room (ER).