

Allergy & Immunology, PLC's  
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## **Allergen Immunotherapy You Can Have A Life Without Allergies**

*An allergist can help you ...*

**GET TESTED! GET TREATED! GET BETTER!**

Why an allergist? An allergist is a doctor specially trained and experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of allergic diseases and related conditions. These include asthma, hay fever, sinusitis, rashes, hives and certain kinds of allergic reactions to foods, insect stings and drugs.

Every board-certified allergist first completes at least three years of specialty training in either internal medicine or pediatrics, and then completes an additional training program of two or more years studying the diagnosis and treatment of allergic and related diseases. Certification by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology requires not only approved training, but also successful completion of a challenging written examination. Every board-certified allergist thus has credentials in at least two specialties and is qualified to care for both children and adults.

As a result, the board-certified allergist-immunologist has the advanced training and expertise in the techniques of finding out what is causing an allergic reaction and how best to solve the problem.

### **Step 1: Consultation**

Your first step is to see a board-certified allergist-immunologist. You may be sent by your primary care physician, follow the recommendation of a family member or friend who is seeing an allergist, or contact the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) to receive a list of allergist members in your area. Call (800) 842-7777 or go to: [Locate an Allergist](#).

Some health plans and HMOs require prior approval to see a specialist. If your request is not immediately honored, ask again and be firm.

## **Step 2: Testing**

Your allergist will obtain a detailed medical history, examine you and evaluate your symptoms. Tests (perhaps lung function tests or x-rays) will be performed to find out the type of your allergic disease. Skin tests or allergy blood tests may be needed to find out the precise causes of your allergic symptoms. Based on the entire clinical evaluation, a diagnosis is made.

If the allergy tests are negative, the allergist can still help find the cause of your symptoms, do not despair. Allergists are also experts in the treatment of *non-allergic* asthma, rhinitis, food and drug reactions, and other types of problems of your immune system, like frequent infections.

## **Step 3: Treatment**

This is the step where your allergic symptoms and you get better. Allergy treatments are of three types: Prevention, Medication, Immunotherapy.

**Prevention:** Once identified, the cause of the symptoms may be avoided or removed from your life. For example, a particular food can be avoided, or a pet can be removed from the home or kept away from sleeping areas.

Some causes of allergic symptoms, such as pollen, molds and dust mites, cannot be completely eliminated and are difficult to avoid. Exposure can be reduced, however, by environmental control measures prescribed by your allergist.

**Medication:** Although prevention comes first, more may be needed. Medications are usually used to decrease allergy symptoms and improve the patient's quality of life. Recent advances in medications for asthma and other allergic diseases have been phenomenal. Improvements in drugs have eliminated most of the side effects from older drugs.

The allergy specialist is an expert in the latest safe and effective medications for treating allergic illness.

**Immunotherapy ("allergy shots"):** If a specific allergy is identified and it cannot be avoided or medications are not sufficient to restore your health, the allergic symptoms may be controlled or eliminated with allergy shots.

Allergy shots have been used since 1911. In the past century, there has been considerable improvement in the effectiveness of this treatment, which decreases a patient's sensitivity (allergy) to a number of allergens, such as cat or ragweed. The treatment is a method for increasing the allergic patient's natural resistance (tolerance) to the things that are triggering the allergic reactions.

This treatment involves injections of small amounts of purified "extracts" of the substances that are causing allergic reactions. For example, the extracts may be derived from pollens, mold spores, animal dander, dust mites or insect venom. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves them for this use, and over the years they have been improved considerably.

Allergy shots stimulate the immune system to fight allergies safely, effectively and naturally. Beginning with small doses and increasing them gradually on a weekly or biweekly basis. The therapy continues until a maintenance level is achieved. Then, a maintenance dose is injected every few weeks.

Immunity does not occur immediately, but some patients do begin to feel better quickly. Most patients are continued on monthly injections for 3 to 5 years once they reach the 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.

With the immune system restored to good health, few or no medications may be needed. Work or school days are no longer missed. The burden of allergies is lifted, and allergies become something you just don't think about any more. Candidates for allergy shots include most children and adults. Pregnant patients can continue treatment that was started prior to pregnancy.

Allergy shots are prescribed by an allergist and are always given under medical supervision at a location where medical staff and medications are available to handle any serious reaction. Although rare, serious reactions can occur from

allergy shots because the treatment involves the substances to which the patient is known to be allergic.

Adverse reactions can occur from allergy shots because treatment involves the injection of substances to which the patient is sensitized. The most common adverse reaction is an immediate red, itching bump at the injection site. In some cases, a similar delayed reaction can occur six to twenty-four hours later. Rare, more severe reactions include generalized itching, chest tightness/wheezing, or dizziness due to a drop in blood pressure. Deaths have been reported from allergy shots at a rate of approximately one in three million injections. This is why allergy shots are given under supervision where medical staff and medications are available to handle serious reactions. As allergists, we feel that the benefits far outweigh the extremely small risk of a serious reaction. It is safe for both children and adults, and even pregnant patients may continue treatment started prior to pregnancy.

## **The Future**

Researchers are now studying ways to go beyond today's treatments. We soon may have better and new ways to block the body's allergic response by reducing or inhibiting the release of histamine and other chemicals that cause allergic reactions. Also, a large group of scientific researchers is working in developing the purest, strongest and safest vaccines for allergy. When these treatments become available, you can be certain that allergists-immunologists will be at the forefront of their use. But you don't have to wait for the future. Today, you can put the misery of allergies out of your life with the help of an allergist.

**Get Tested! Get Treated! Get Better!**