



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ALLERGY SHOTS

What are allergy shots and how do they work?

Allergy shots are a program of injections designed to lessen your sensitivity to allergens such as house dust, dust mites, ragweed, grass, tree pollens and molds. The injections are highly purified extracts of the substances to which you are allergic. Very dilute (weak) extracts are administered initially with progressively stronger doses being given over time. Your sensitivity will thus decrease to the allergens and you will tolerate exposure to them much better.

How often are allergy shots given?

We recommend that allergy shots be administered weekly during the build-up phase of therapy. After the maintenance dose is reached, injections are usually given weekly for about 3 – 6 months, at which time the interval between shots may be increased to every 2 – 3 weeks. Some individuals will even do well receiving shots every 4 – 6 weeks.

How long are allergy shots given?

Benefit is often slow to develop and shots must be continued for at least 1 to 1 ½ years. If the injections are effective, they are generally continued until there is one symptom-free year. The average period of time to attain this success is 3 – 5 years, but varies highly with different individuals. Before stopping the injections, a revisit with the allergist is recommended.

When might I see improvement from the shots?

Most individuals experience some improvement when the maximum tolerated dose has been given for 6 – 12 months. The longer the program is given, the more benefit or improvement is gained.

Can I give the shots myself or have a family member give them?

NO. REACTIONS, although rare, can occur and therefore shots must be given by a physician or under a physician's supervision in a private office, clinic or hospital.

Can I get my allergy shot if I am having trouble with my allergies?

Generally, yes. The only reasons for not giving the allergy shots are a fever above 100° F and/or an acute asthma attack. Nasal congestion, a mild 'cold' , or headaches are not reasons to withhold the shots. Often these are the reasons for giving the shots.

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If I get my shots at another office, how/when do I reorder new extract?

Check with your physician for their policy regarding the administration of allergy shots. Periodically check with the nurse regarding the amount of extract that is left. When there is enough serum left for about 1 – 2 injections, have the nurse reorder the extract by faxing us the shot record with a cover sheet indicating the correct mailing information.

What kind of reactions can develop?

Reactions from allergy shots fall into two major categories. LOCAL reactions occur at the injections site. SYSTEMIC reactions involve the entire body.

LOCAL REACTIONS: A small red, itchy local reaction, the size of a quarter or smaller may occur within minutes of the injection and can last up to 24 hours following the shot. This is a NORMAL REACTION. Local reactions that are larger or last longer are NOT NORMAL and should be reported to the doctor or nurse. Local reactions are easily avoided by adjusting the dose.

SYSTEMIC REACTIONS: The onset of this type of reaction occurs within minutes of the injection or can occur the night of the injection and may include a flare of symptoms, such as wheezing, coughing, itchy eyes and nose, hives, dizziness or fatigue. If this type of reaction occurs after leaving the office, you should call the office and/or proceed to an emergency facility for further evaluation and treatment. Antihistamines may be taken to control itching, but will not reverse the reaction completely.

In your best interest, we recommend that all patients stay in the doctor's office for 20 - 30 minutes following an allergy shot. The vast majority of severe reactions are likely to occur in this time period. Reactions may occur during build-up or maintenance injections, and during the season that you have the greatest difficulty, since your sensitivity will be heightened.

Can other medications be taken while on allergy shots?

YES. Allergy shots work in a different way than other allergy medicine. Those medications for hay fever or asthma that you are currently using SHOULD be taken if needed or prescribed by your doctor. And remember to always keep your allergist up to date on any other prescription medications you are taking to avoid any complications.

If we go on vacation, will it hurt to miss some of the shots?

Some individuals will have a slight increase in symptoms if they miss several shots. These are often easy to treat by taking antihistamines or decongestants. If you plan to be gone longer than 3 – 4 weeks, the dose will have to be reduced and built up again when restarted. Because of this, patients who anticipate being gone for this period of time may take their extract with them on vacation and have a physician in that area give the injection. PLEASE NOTE: Extracts are HEAT and COLD SENSITIVE. They should always be stored in a refrigerator. Freezing or prolonged exposure to temperatures greater than 50° F, WILL INACTIVATE THE MEDICINE. Always transport the extract in an ice chest to avoid loss of potency.



ALLERGY & ASTHMA
AFFILIATES

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