



# Exton Allergy & Asthma Associates

www.extonallergy.com

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## INFORMATION ABOUT ALLERGEN IMMUNOTHERAPY (ALLERGY INJECTIONS)

Allergen immunotherapy, also known as allergy shots is an effective treatment program that aims to induce immunity to substances that trigger allergic symptoms called allergens. It involves administering gradually increasing amounts of an allergen to a patient over several months. The injections are started weekly until the maintenance level is reached and then are continued once a month. This process reduces or eliminates symptoms that are otherwise triggered by allergen exposure. This form of treatment is the closest thing to a "cure" for allergic symptoms.

In the vast majority of patients, it will result in elimination or reduction of allergy symptoms and the need for allergy medications, once the maintenance dose of immunotherapy is reached. The effect of this treatment persists for many years after the course is completed. For environmental allergens, this treatment has a success rate of over 80%. The success rate exceeds 95% for the treatment of stinging insect venom allergy.

The composition of allergen immunotherapy extracts is determined by your clinical allergy symptoms as well as the results of your allergy skin or blood test. A series of allergen extracts is made up of 4 or 5 vials of increasing strength. Allergen immunotherapy is started at a very small dose of the lowest strength and over time both dose and strength will gradually increase. For environmental allergens, the build-up phase takes 6 to 7 months of weekly injections, whereas for venom allergy it is usually completed in 4 months. Once you have reached the maintenance dose, the injections will be given monthly for 3 to 5 years. This treatment alters your abnormal (allergic) immune response and enables you to tolerate allergens without causing symptoms.

Before you commit to immunotherapy, you should determine whether and to what extent allergen extract and injections are covered under your health insurance benefits. It is preferable that you receive your shots in our office that will enable us to monitor and adjust your treatment; however, your insurance may require you to receive your injections at your primary physician's office. In that case, you will receive the first injection of each new vial in our office and complete the rest of the injections from that vial at your primary physician's.

Once you decide that you wish to proceed with allergen immunotherapy, you will have to sign a consent form so that we can prepare your individualized allergen extract and start your immunotherapy. We will notify you when it is ready and expect you to start shots soon thereafter, since the shelf life of allergen extracts is limited.

You have to take an antihistamine such as loratadine (Claritin) or ceterizine (Zyrtec) 1-2 hours before you receive your allergy injection to reduce your risk of an adverse reaction. After receiving each and every allergy injection you will have to remain in the office under observation for 30 minutes. Patients with asthma will have to check their peak flow before and after receiving their injection. You should report any current illness before receiving your allergy injections.

If after leaving the office you develop a local reaction, please make a note of how large it was and for how long it lasted. This information is needed so that we can give you the appropriate dose at your next visit. Besides taking an antihistamine, applying ice to the site of injection will reduce the local reactions.

If you experience a systemic reaction (shortness of breath, chest tightness, cough, wheezing, skin itching, flushing or hives away from the site of injection) after leaving the office you have to call us or go to the nearest emergency room, if your symptoms are severe or progressive. Please notify us after any adverse reaction or if injections are missed, so we can adjust your dose.

Allergy injections are given during the "Shot Clinic" sessions, Tuesdays from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Wednesday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM and Thursdays from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. It is advisable that you set up an appointment and should arrive 30 minutes before the office closes to receive your allergy injection. If you will be receiving your injections at your primary physician's office (after the first one from each vial from us), please remember to bring a copy of your injection schedule with you when returning for your next vial. This information is needed for you to receive your next injection from a new vial. You must inform us if you take or start a beta-blocker at any time, since this type of medication will reduce your response to epinephrine, which will be necessary to treat you, if you develop an allergic reaction to immunotherapy.