

ALLERGY SHOTS (Injections)

A long word for getting allergy shots is hyposensitization. This word just means that you are lowering how sensitive you are to certain things around you. Your doctor has found out which things you are sensitive to by performing some tests on your back and by asking you many questions.

The shots contain very tiny amounts of those things to which you are allergic. This treats the basic cause of the problems you came to see us about -- allergy. It will increase your resistance to the allergies that bother you so that when you are around those things, your symptoms will be less severe.

Allergy shots are used in patients who have severe symptoms which can't be relieved by taking medications or avoiding the allergen. They have been used since 1911. Since that time, many studies have shown that the vast majority of people who take the shots as part of a quality program will get better.

It usually takes about 4 to 6 months of being on the shots before you will notice a decrease in your symptoms. After the first year, most people notice significant improvement. Over the next several years, they will continue to improve until, eventually, the shots are stopped. A few people do not get better with the shots, even though the shots contain the right allergens and are given in the proper manner. If this is the case after 12 to 18 months, the shots should be stopped. This decision should be made by your doctor and you.

There is really no good way to decide how long the shots should be given. At least 4 years is recommended. However, the shots should probably not be stopped until the patient has gone for one year without serious symptoms.

Once allergy shots are stopped, how long the benefits last varies from one person to another. Some people remain without symptoms forever. Others will have mild symptoms return, but will be able to control them with medications. For a few patients, symptoms not only return, but increase. These patients require restarting of the shots. For these patients, retesting may not be required, and they usually progress to twice monthly injections quickly.

For our patients, we will usually have you take your shots twice a week for about 12 weeks to reach a maintenance dose. Then you will get your shots once a week for about 12 or 18 months. After this, you will gradually decrease your shots, going from every two weeks, to every three weeks, and finally to once a month, in some people.

Important Points To Remember

1. Never take your shot on an empty stomach. This can cause you to have a reaction to the shot.
2. Never take an allergy shot if you have a fever. You should be fever free for 24 hours before having a shot.
3. If you have poison ivy or some kind of rash, it may be better not to take your shot. Check with the nurse before getting your shot.
4. If you get a shot for flu, tetanus, or some other immunization, you should wait at least 24 hours before taking your allergy shot.
5. Always report any reaction you have had before you get your next shot. Do this whether it happens right after taking your shot or later in the evening.

Getting Your Shots - What You Need To Know

Are Allergy Shots Dangerous?

Generally speaking, allergy shots are quite safe. Sometimes they can cause reactions. This is because they contain the very things to which you are allergic. A reaction can happen right after you get your shot, or it can occur later in the evening. If a serious reaction is going to take place, it will happen soon after you take your shot. This is why we ask that you wait in the office for 20 minutes after each shot.

How Long Will It Take?

You should allow about 30 minutes for each shot. This will give you 20 minutes to wait in the office, plus some time in case the office is crowded and you have to wait a few minutes before your shot.

What Can Happen?

There are two types of reactions to allergy shots that we are concerned about. The first is a local reaction, and the second is a systemic reaction. As we said before, a local reaction happens just around the area where the shot was given. A systemic reaction can happen in several different areas of your body.

Local Reactions: The local reaction we are talking about here is different from the normal local reaction. Your arm may get red, itch, or you may have a welt larger than a quarter, and there may be some pain. If you notice any of these within the first 20

minutes, report it at once to the nurse or doctor. These symptoms can usually be relieved quickly. If they occur at home, you may want to take an antihistamine, apply ice to the area, and take aspirin or tylenol. If you ever have a lot of itching or pain, swelling larger than a quarter that lasts longer than 24 hours, or an arm that feels feverish to the touch, be sure to report it to the nurse before your next shot. Your dose may need to be lowered.

Systemic Reactions: This type of reaction is rare, but you should know about it in case it does happen. As long as you are getting shots made of something you are allergic to, there is the chance you could have a systemic or even life-threatening reaction. If something severe is going to happen, it will be right away after taking your shot. This is why it is so important for you to wait in the office for at least 20 minutes after each shot. We are prepared for this type of emergency. Signs of a systemic reaction are: itching of the throat, nose, eyes, palms, or skin; hives, sneezing, runny nose, coughing and wheezing. If you notice any of these within the first twenty minutes, report to the doctor or nurse at once. If they occur on the way home, take an antihistamine and/or anti-wheezing medication at once and return to the clinic. If it is after office hours, go to the nearest emergency room.