



Immunotherapy is the only possible permanent solution for allergy problems.

is when you will start to see the most benefit. This can take as few as eight weeks, or may take a few months depending on the method used by the allergist.

As the body begins to recognize these small amounts of allergens, the immune system stops reacting so aggressively to them. Over time signals are activated and sent to the cells that produce allergic antibodies telling the cells to stop making them. Once the shots are administered at full strength, the time between shots can be rescheduled to once every month.

No one likes shots, but the needle is very small and the injection is not deep, so pain is fairly minimal. Although there can be some redness, most people tolerate the shot very well. Though uncommon, a whole-body allergic reaction may occur. Immunotherapy should only be done in an allergist's office where staff are trained to respond to allergic reactions.

Immunotherapy can be administered for allergies caused by pollens or pets. Those of you who are allergic to insect stings should use immunotherapy to alter the life-threatening effects of a sting. Currently, no proven immunotherapy for food allergies exists.

Depending on your allergist, immunotherapy can be started in children as young as four or five years of age. Presently, there is no set upper age limit, as long as no other health conditions prevail to interfere with the ability to treat side effects, should they occur. If you have poorly controlled asthma, you should not start immunotherapy until your asthma is under control.

Insurance companies usually cover allergy shots. When compared to medications and the various other costs related to allergies, studies show that immunotherapy saves money. Depending on the source of the allergies, a good response to immunotherapy can be expected in 75 to 95 percent of patients. Because immune systems are retrained, many people can stop the allergy shots after three to five years. Lasting relief, even when the shots

have been stopped, can be expected. Immunotherapy is the only possible permanent solution for allergy problems. Ask your allergist if immunotherapy would be a choice for you.

To make an appointment with an allergist near you, we invite you to visit the index at the back of this publication or intermountainmedicalgroup.org.

IMMUNOTHERAPY:

- Is proven effective.
- Reduces the number of medications needed to treat allergies.
- Can treat pollen, pet, and stinging-insect allergies.
- Retrains the immune system.
- May be a permanent solution to allergy problems.
- Should only be done by a specialist with training in allergic disease.

PERMANENT ALLERGY RELIEF?

With immunotherapy, it is now a possibility.

By Robert L. Silge, MD

Do you suffer from allergies? If so, you may wonder if you will ever be rid of the numerous medications you take to keep your allergies controlled. Many of us take two, three, or more medications: an antihistamine for itching, a nasal spray for runny nose, and eye drops for red eyes. Does it ever stop? Is there an option that will allow you to reduce the number of medicines that you take?

An option for many allergy sufferers is allergen immunotherapy, more commonly referred to as allergy shots. To understand why this may be a good option for you, let's start with an explanation of allergies.

We all make antibodies to protect ourselves. Most antibodies fight against viruses and bacteria. Allergies occur when our bodies make a special class of antibodies to things like pollen, pet dander, and foods, or things that are only mildly harmful like bee stings. Immunotherapy is the process by which we retrain the immune system to stop reacting to these non-threats.

How is this done? The best studied and most effective way is to inject you, the allergy-suffering patient, with very small amounts of allergens. A liquid mixture, or allergen cocktail, of all the things you are allergic to is specially made for you. At first a very small amount is injected just under the skin. Over time the concentration is increased to maximum strength, which

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