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ALLERGEN IMMUNOTHERAPY

Allergen immunotherapy, also known as “allergy shots” or “immunotherapy”, is a method of treatment for allergies that modifies the immune system to provide long-lasting benefit. It consists of 2 phases: 1) Build-up; and 2) Maintenance. During the build-up phase, increasing amounts of allergen is injected at specified intervals until a “maintenance” dose is reached. Once this dose is reached, a constant/fixed amount of allergen is administered according to a prescribed schedule, usually every 2-4 weeks for 4-5 years. Symptom improvement is usually not seen until 6-18 months after initiation and after the maintenance dose is reached. Cluster immunotherapy option, allowing a more rapid build-up phase, often provides faster symptom relief.

Due to the possibility of a reaction that may require immediate therapy, these injections must be administered at a medical facility with an overseeing physician.

These reactions may include:

- Itchy eyes, nose, and/or throat
- Nasal congestion, runny nose, and/or sneezing
- Chest tightness, shortness of breath, and/or wheeze
- Cough
- Hives/rash, generalized itching/flushing
- Nausea
- Lightheadedness, weakness, fainting, or rarely shock (drop in blood pressure)

Despite all precautions, occasional reactions are unavoidable and may be serious, even very rarely life threatening. Most reactions occur within 30 minutes of the injection; therefore, we require that you wait 30 minutes in the office after receiving each injection.

Reactions may occasionally occur after the 30-minute wait, so you should bring your epinephrine auto-injector (if prescribed) to each injection. In addition, to minimize a possible delayed reaction, you should not engage in strenuous activity or hot showers/baths for 2 hours after the injection.

Most severe systemic reactions occur in patients with asthma who are having increased asthma symptoms. Therefore, if you have asthma, it is important for you to notify the nursing staff before receiving your injection if your asthma symptoms (cough, wheeze, shortness of breath) have increased or you have had to use your rescue medication (inhaler/nebulizer) that day as a result.

You should inform our office if you start blood pressure/heart medications called “Beta Blockers”, which can worsen the course of a severe reaction.

You should notify our office if you become pregnant or plan on becoming pregnant during immunotherapy treatment as this may affect the shot schedule. A parent or legal guardian must accompany minor patients.

References: 1. Cox, L. *JACI* 2008; 122: 432-4.
2. Schubert, R., et al. *Int Arch Allergy Immunol* 2009; 148: 251-260

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