

# Allergen Immunotherapy

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## Allergen Immunotherapy

### What is Immunotherapy?



**Allergen  
Immunotherapy**

Immunotherapy is a treatment used to relieve allergy symptoms of hay fever or allergic asthma. This is done by administering injections of substances such as pollens, mold spores, dust mites, animal dander, or insects to which an individual has been found to be allergic by skin testing. When performed properly by a trained allergy specialist, the patient becomes partially or fully desensitized to their allergen triggers.

An allergy is an abnormal immune system hypersensitivity. When an allergic person is exposed to an allergy-causing substance (such as cat dander), he or she may develop symptoms of sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion, water eyes, chest tightness, or wheezing. Various cells that line the nose and airways release various chemicals and mediators that cause these symptoms. Inflammation of the tissues accompanies this process and leads to persistent symptoms. Immunotherapy works to interfere with this complex allergic interaction and keeps inflammation and symptoms from getting started and seems to 'turn off' the abnormal immune reaction. We now have available injection-free immunotherapy (sublingual drops) that do the same thing for select patients.

### How are injections given and for how long?

During the 'build up' phase, increasing doses of allergy injections are given once or twice a week until a predetermined target or 'maintenance' dose is reached. Symptom improvement with allergy shots usually occurs in the first 6 months to year, and possibly sooner with rapid desensitization protocols. In a small percentage of patients, there is no improvement and immunotherapy may be discontinued or the patient retested. When symptoms do improve, maintenance injections are usually continued for 3 to 5 years, usually at one biweekly or monthly injection. At that time, most patients can stop immunotherapy and continue to enjoy prolonged benefits.

### What are the benefits of immunotherapy

Most patients experience less medication dependence over time and a reduction in number of upper respiratory infections or asthma exacerbations. Immunotherapy is proven to improve patient quality of life compared to standard medical therapy. In certain patients, immunotherapy may delay or prevent the onset of childhood asthma and prevent further allergen sensitization over time.

## What are some risks or drawbacks

Immunotherapy requires a commitment to the 'build-up' phase of therapy to be effective, which requires multiple visits to receive injections. It is not meant for acute symptom control, so medications are usually continued in the short-term. Since patients are undergoing true desensitization, there is a risk of local and systemic allergic reactions. Immunotherapy injections are not prescribed for home administration, but allergy drops may be an option for home self-therapy.

### 5 Star!

Dr Richard Mayse  
& all the staff are  
exceptional!

— *Janice Raver*

### TRAAC Staff

The staff at Texas Regional Asthma and Allergy Center are standing by to help you! If you have questions, need to set appointments or any other service related items, call today!

### Contact Traac

If you have questions or comments, please contact us directly! We welcome your suggestions and hope to make your experience the best it can be!

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