



ALLERGY TESTING AND TREATMENT

What is allergen immunotherapy, and how does it work?

Allergen immunotherapy (AIT) is a type of treatment used to reduce allergy symptoms and improve quality of life. This is done by giving you regular and repeated doses of an allergen(s) (things you are allergic to). When you take gradually increasing doses of allergens, your immune system builds up a tolerance and becomes less sensitive/reactive. While on immunotherapy, you will need to continue prescribed/OTC allergy medications while still symptomatic.

Who should get allergen immunotherapy?

If you are five years and older, experience symptoms of allergic rhinitis (environmental allergies) and have positive allergy test results, you may be a candidate for AIT. Allergic rhinitis is a condition in which the inside of the nose becomes inflamed and irritated. This happens when your body's immune system reacts to an allergen. Symptoms can include sneezing, itching or runny nose, and nasal congestion (blockage). If you are unable to manage your symptoms with regular medication and prefer a treatment with lasting benefits, AIT could be the right treatment for you.

How does testing work, and what are the different immunotherapy treatment options?

The testing involves placing allergens under the skin with a small needle and then monitoring to determine what you are allergic to and the severity of your reaction. Once we have determined the specific allergies you have, we create a unique mix of the things you are allergic to so that we can administer them in small amounts for treatment. By making this unique mix, we can treat you for all the things you are allergic to at one time. There are two ways to administer AIT:

- **Subcutaneous immunotherapy (SCIT)**, which involves placing allergens in an injection (shot) and placing this in your upper arm. Initially, you will receive these injections weekly, and they must be done at the office.
- **Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT)**, which involves placing allergens in a drop form under your tongue. These can be done at home, as there is far less of a risk of any type of negative reaction.

How long does it take to see a benefit?

At the beginning of treatment, the dose you are getting will slowly increase until you reach maintenance (the highest dose during treatment). Treatment continues for three to five years. Typically, you will see a decrease in symptoms within the first year and will continue to improve until completion after the three to five years. Some people have lasting remission of their allergy symptoms and will not have to repeat testing, while others can relapse after discontinuing immunotherapy, so the duration of allergen immunotherapy varies from person to person.

What are the risks?

Both SCIT (shots) and SLIT (drops) are considered safe and effective treatment options. However, they can induce a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis on rare occasions. Anaphylaxis can affect different parts of your body. Signs and symptoms can range from mild to severe. Before you receive AIT, your health care provider should assess your overall health care status and discuss all potential risks. You will receive an EpiPen® (epinephrine) to use in case of a severe reaction. Your provider will discuss how to use this medication with you prior to you starting treatment.