

Allergen immunotherapy injections

Allergy Service

Information for Patients

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What is allergen immunotherapy?

Allergen immunotherapy (or desensitisation) is a treatment that can be given to people who are allergic to pollen or venom. It involves having injections of increasing amounts of the substance to which you are allergic (the allergen).

Over time, this will help your body to cope when it comes into contact with your allergen so that you have fewer symptoms in the future.

What does the treatment involve?

There may be 2 phases to the treatment; the up-dosing phase and the maintenance phase. In the up-dosing phase of treatment, the dose of allergen is increased with each injection. The duration and frequency of injections differ according to the type of immunotherapy. At the end of this stage you may move on to the maintenance dose, when you will receive the same dose at regular fixed interval.

In most cases, this is a 3 year treatment programme and is a big commitment for patients.

What can I expect to happen at each visit?

At each visit the nurse will:

- check that you are well (if you are unwell you will not be able to receive your injection).
- ask you about any changes in your health or medication.
- check your blood pressure, pulse and simple breathing test.
- give you your injection into your upper arm then ask you to wait in the clinic for 1 hour **afterwards** so that we can treat any immediate side effects quickly.
- arrange your next appointment and fill in your records.

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What are the possible side effects of this treatment?

It is normal to have some mild redness, itching and swelling to the skin where the injection is given. You can take antihistamine tablets for this. Another common side effect is tiredness for the rest of the day after your injection.

The risk of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) is rare, but can happen. This would usually happen within the first hour after your injection, which is why we need you to stay in clinic for an hour.

Other possible side effects are:

- blocked or runny nose (rhinitis).
- urticaria - this looks like a nettle rash or hives anywhere on your body.
- breathing difficulties - such as breathlessness, chest tightness, wheeze or cough.

These symptoms may happen several hours after the injection has been given. If you have any difficulty breathing and you have a reliever inhaler, you must use it immediately. Antihistamines should be taken for urticaria or rhinitis. If your symptoms do not improve and you have urticaria or breathing difficulties you should dial 999.

If you have any side effects after your treatment, please contact the allergy nurses as soon as possible. Your treatment can then be discussed with your consultant.

General advice

Missing an appointment or having a lapse in treatment may affect the dose of your injection and the progression of your treatment. If you are unable to attend, please contact the team on **0116 258 3557** so that we can rearrange your appointment.

Do:

- take antihistamines before your injection unless instructed differently by the nurse. This helps to reduce itching, redness and swelling to the injection site.
- continue to carry your adrenaline auto injector pens at all times if you have a bee or wasp allergy.
- **tell us if:**
 - there are any changes to your health or you are ill.
 - you are taking any new prescribed medication, including ones you have bought yourself.
 - you have been stung or need to have any vaccines.
 - you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant.

Don't:

- don't do strenuous exercise, drink alcohol or have a hot bath on the day of your injection.
- don't come to the clinic if you are unwell in any way. Contact the team to rearrange your appointment.

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