

FAMILY PRACTICE ASSOCIATES, P.C.

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SUBLINGUAL IMMUNOTHERAPY (SLIT)

Allergy immunotherapy has been used around the world for over 100 years with studies showing that allergy drops are safe and effective. Allergy immunotherapy has been proven to be effective in patients with allergic rhinitis, allergic conjunctivitis, and allergic asthma. It may also be useful for other forms of allergies, including atopic dermatitis (eczema). It may also prevent the development of asthma in patients with hay fever. Physicians actually used allergy drops before they used allergy shots. The World Health Organization has endorsed SLIT as a viable alternative to allergy shots. The Cochrane Collaboration, the world's most trusted international organization dedicated to reviewing healthcare treatments, concluded that allergy drop immunotherapy significantly reduced allergy symptoms and the use of allergy medications. Physicians in Europe have been using SLIT for over 15 years.

Unlike most allergy drugs-which temporarily treat allergy symptoms-sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) addresses the *underlying* cause of allergies. Allergy drops are administered under the tongue in gradually increasing dosages until the patient develops a tolerance to the allergy-causing substance. The area under the tongue has the highest concentration of antigen/allergen-presenting cells found in the body. This cell, called the dendritic cell, is the messenger that delivers antigens to the cells that enable allergy tolerance. By delivering daily allergy drops to this cell, the body begins to tolerate things that cause allergic reactions.

Common examples of allergens include pollen from trees, grasses, weeds. Other allergens include mold spores, dust mites, animals (dogs, cats) and specific foods (dairy, peanuts, fish, eggs, wheat, corn).

In the past, most immunotherapy was provided through allergy shots, called subcutaneous immunotherapy (SCIT). Today, SLIT is a safe, effective, affordable, and convenient way to treat your allergies. Advantages of SLIT include: reduced time spent for doctor visits over SCIT, taking your drops at home, no needles involved, reduced need for long-term allergy medication and changing the underlying disease by treating the cause, not just masking the symptoms.

Allergy drops gradually help build the body's tolerance to an allergen. Over time, the allergy treatment results in fewer symptoms and medication needs. Most patients take allergy drops daily for 3-5 years. This can vary according to the severity of the allergies, seasonality, and how adherent they are to treatment. Many patients notice symptom improvement in a few weeks to months, but need to continue using the drops through the full course of therapy to get long-term benefit.

Minor reactions to allergy immunotherapy include: runny nose, itchy nose, cough, conjunctival redness or itching, and nausea. Moderate to severe reactions are very rare with SLIT. These reactions include: shortness of breath, wheezing, abdominal cramps, tongue or throat swelling, low blood pressure. You will be monitored for 30 minutes after your first SLIT treatment for any immediate side effects. You will be required to get a prescription from your provider for epinephrine prior to starting SLIT.

As verified by a World Allergy Organization report, "The safety of SLIT is superior to that of SCIT, and no fatality has been reported in 23 years of trials and clinical use in the U.S."

Insurance companies may cover the cost of office visits and diagnostic testing. However, because allergy drops are an off-label use of FDA-approved antigens, they are not typically covered by insurance. The antigens used in allergy drops are the same FDA-approved antigens used in allergy shots. A number of FDA-approved biologics are considered off label use when delivered via sublingual immunotherapy, which is both legal and highly common. (As an aside, most physicians prescribe drugs in an off-label manner today, i.e. the use of blood-pressure medications for migraines, montelukast (Singulair) for COPD or arthritis drugs to treat shingles). Allergy drops do qualify for HSA or Flex Spending reimbursement. Monthly costs of SLIT are comparable to costs of prescriptions and less expensive than injection immunotherapy.

Resources:

1. Canonica et al. World Allergy Organization Journal 2014, 7:6.
2. AAAAI: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.
3. AAOA: American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy: "Sublingual Therapy (SLIT) Update" 2009 and the AAOA Sublingual Task Force.
4. Allergen immunotherapy: A practice parameter third update, by Cox, Nelson and Lockey, MDs 2010
5. Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA).

ALLERGY SKIN TESTING

Allergy skin testing takes about 30 minutes. You will be asked to complete an allergy questionnaire prior to the skin testing appointment.

Please stop taking the following medications, with your physician's approval, at least 7 days prior to the testing:

Antihistamines:

Brompheniramine (Dimetane)// Cetirizine (Zyrtec)// Chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton)// Clemastine (Tavist)// Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)// Fexofenadine (Allegra)// Loratadine (Alavert, Claritin) // antihistamine eye drops

Tricyclic antidepressants:

Amitriptyline// Amoxapine// Desipramine (Norpramin)// Doxepin// Imipramine (Tofranil)// Nortriptyline (Pamelor)// Protriptyline (Vivactil)// Trimipramine (Surmontil)

Beta-blockers: (used for hypertension, stage fright, migraines). You must get the approval of the prescribing physician to temporarily discontinue these medications:

Acebutolol (Sectral)// atenolol (Tenormin)// betaxolol (Kerlone)// betaxolol (Betoptic S)// bisoprolol fumarate (Zebeta)// carvedilol (Coreg)// esmolol (Brevibloc)// labetalol (Trandate [Normodyne - discontinued])// metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol XL)// nadolol (Corgard)// nebivolol (Bystolic)// penbutolol (Levitol)// propranolol (Hemangeol, Inderal LA, Inderal XL, InnoPran XL)// sotalol (Betapace, Sorine)// timolol (Blocadren, discontinued)// timolol ophthalmic solution (Timoptic, Betimol, Istalol)

H2-blockers:

Ranitidine (Zantac)// cimetidine (Tagamet)// famotadine (Pepcid)// nizatidine (Axid)

Over-the-Counter Sleep Aids / Cough Medications:

Anything "PM": Tylenol PM (contains Benadryl), Advil PM (contains Benadryl), Nyquil (contains Doxylamine), ZzzQuil (contains Benadryl)

Supplements:

Licorice, St. John's wort, milk thistle, green tea, feverfew, astragalus, saw palmetto

Please review your medication and supplement list with your provider prior to scheduling the allergy testing appointment.

We use a prick/puncture test, place on your back or forearm. This device allows us to test for multiple antigens at a time. After 15-20 minutes, we will check the test site to see which allergens have caused a reaction called a wheal (a tiny bump). A wheal may indicate sensitivity to the allergen.

Cost of SLIT: starting at \$87 per month for a 6-month supply