

Allergy Injections/Important Answers

HOW DO ALLERGY INJECTIONS WORK?

Allergy injections work like a vaccine by containing traces of your specific allergens -- the very things that trigger an allergic reaction. With gradual increases in the doses of your allergen, your body develops an immunity or tolerance to that allergen. You may begin to see the benefits of allergy shots during the build-up phase, but it may take as long as 6-12 months on the maintenance dose to start seeing significant results. On average, maintenance therapy is continued for three to five years.

HOW OFTEN WILL I GET MY INJECTIONS?

While you are building to your maintenance dose, injections must be received *every 2-10 days*. Once you attain maintenance treatment, they should be received every 1-4 weeks. Most patients are able to discontinue injections after 3-5 years. You and your provider can make these decisions at an annual appointment. An annual visit to monitor your progress is necessary to maintain an allergy injection program.

When starting new vials of maintenance extract, your injection dose will be decreased as a safety measure to account for variations between vials and increased potency of new extract. Your dose will be increased back to your maintenance dose with subsequent injections. Regardless of your usual schedule, injections must be received every 2 days to 2 weeks to build back to your maintenance dose with new vials. Allergy injections are not like steroid injections and must be received regularly for safety; they are not meant to be used on an "as needed" basis.

WHAT IF I AM LATE FOR MY INJECTION?

This depends on many factors including how late you are, your injection interval, and the last dose you received. Typically, if you are a week late you will receive a repeat of your previous dose. If you are more than a week late your dose may need to be decreased. If you are very late you may even need to restart your program, which may necessitate making new extract. Please call our office if you are more than 4 weeks late or the nurse discussed that you must be on time for your next injection due to expiration date or dosing needs.

Keep in mind that your extract has expiration dates and that being on time is important, especially while building in your starter set; however, we do expect everyone to be late once in a while due to illness, vacation, or other reasons.

MAY I RECEIVE MY INJECTION IF I AM SICK?

No, as a safety precaution you should not receive an allergy injection if you are too ill to go to work/school. Receiving an injection while you are ill may overburden your immune system. Patients with asthma should be especially mindful of this and not receive an injection if their asthma is flaring or they felt the need to use their rescue inhaler within the preceding 24 hours (other than for exercise). This is not due to an interaction between the injection and albuterol; it merely indicates that your respiratory system may be compromised.

You may receive your injections while your allergy symptoms are flaring. In fact, we encourage patients to come more frequently during difficult seasons as it may help control symptoms. However, as stated above, you should not receive an injection if these symptoms are severe enough to cause an asthma flare or require your absence from work or school. Please call our office if you have questions about being well enough to receive your injection.

WHY DO I HAVE TO WAIT 30 MINUTES IN THE OFFICE AFTER MY INJECTION?

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While systemic reactions to allergy injections are rare, the most serious reactions often occur within the first 30 minutes following administration. In compliance with the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology's guidelines, it is Grand Rapids Allergy's policy that all patients wait in the waiting room for 30 minutes following their injections to ensure that prompt treatment can be administered if you should experience a systemic reaction. Although fatal reactions to allergy injections have been reported, most were due to a delay in treatment. Please remember that a systemic reaction can occur at any time, sometimes after years of maintenance therapy. *A 30-minute wait after your injection is imperative for your safety.* If you fail to comply, we will be forced to terminate our injection services.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT LOCAL REACTIONS TO MY INJECTIONS?

Local reactions such as redness, swelling, and/or itching limited to the injection site are common. Studies have shown they are not indicative of systemic reaction, although they can be painful and irritating. Please let the nurse giving your injection know if this occurs so that prevention techniques can be discussed. This may include icing the injection site before and after injection, holding pressure at the site for 2 minutes following injection, and/or pretreating with an antihistamine. If your local reactions are severe enough that you are considering discontinuing injections, please let our staff know, as modifications of components, doses, or types of extract can be tried - most patients are able to find an appropriate strength and composition to allow control of their symptoms without significant discomfort.

WHAT IS A SYSTEMIC REACTION?

Please pay attention to how you feel prior to your injection and how you feel after. **You should not feel any different after your injection.** A systemic reaction is an indication that your body is not tolerating the amount of extract you received and can include symptoms such as sneezing or runny nose to hives or difficulty breathing. It is important to inform our office of any suspected reaction so that you can be evaluated, and your dose adjusted. **Immediately tell a nurse or other GRA employee if you experience these symptoms.** If you experience a reaction after you leave our office and it is of a life-threatening nature (wheezing, hives, swelling) call 911. Always report any symptoms to our office prior to coming in for your next injection. This allows your physician time to make dose adjustments.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT REACTIONS?

Grand Rapids Allergy suggests pretreating with a non-sedating antihistamine such as Claritin or Zyrtec approximately one hour before receiving an injection, which may prevent or reduce the severity of a reaction. Patients who have experienced prior reactions may elect to carry an epinephrine auto-injector for use in the event of a rare delayed systemic reaction.

WHAT HAPPENS AT MY ANNUAL APPOINTMENT?

Annual revisits are required to continue allergy injections. At these visits we review your program, decide whether changes need to be made, and refill prescription medications. Sometimes your extract program may be changed to better meet your needs. These visits are important to evaluate whether you are receiving the most appropriate and efficacious treatment possible. Your extract order may be placed on hold if you are extremely overdue for an appointment.

WHEN ARE YOU OPEN FOR INJECTIONS?

Injections are given Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday 7:30 am – 4:30 pm and Tuesdays 7:30 am – 6:00 pm. Cluster administration hours will end promptly at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday and at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday to allow time to complete each cluster visit. No injections are given on Friday.

PLEASE INFORM OUR OFFICE IF YOU BECOME PREGNANT OR ARE PLACED ON A BETA- BLOCKER

This information is meant to act as general guide to allergy injections. Each patient is different and requires an individualized plan of care. Your course of treatment may differ from that described above. Please feel free to call our office with any questions at **616-949-4840**.