

The Allergy & Asthma Center

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Allergy Shots: Could They Help Your Allergies?

What are allergy shots?

An allergy shot contains a very small amount of the substance that you are allergic to (called an allergen). Common allergens include mold and pollen from grasses, ragweed and trees. So, for example, if you are allergic to grass pollen, a small amount of grass pollen will be put into the shot.

How do allergy shots work?

Allergy shots help your body fight the allergen. When you get shots of the allergen, your body makes antibodies to the allergen. The next time you have contact with the allergen, these antibodies help block its effect. Because the antibodies block the way your body reacts to the allergen, your allergy symptoms become less severe. After many allergy shots, you might start to get relief from your allergy symptoms. This relief will last for a long time.

What kind of allergies can be treated with allergy shots?

Allergy shots work well for pollen allergies (also called allergic rhinitis or hay fever), eye allergies, bee-sting allergies and some drug allergies. In some people, allergy shots can improve asthma symptoms.

Usually people get allergy shots after they have tried other treatments that haven't worked. Other treatments include avoiding allergens and taking medicine, such as an antihistamine.

Can everyone get allergy shots?

No. Allergy shots may not be good for you if you have severe asthma or heart problems. You shouldn't get allergy shots if you take a beta blocker for heart problems. Children younger than 5 years of age also shouldn't get allergy shots.

You shouldn't start allergy shots if you are pregnant. If you have been taking allergy shots for some time and become pregnant, talk to your doctor. You may be able to continue taking your allergy shots.

What will happen if my doctor and I choose allergy shots to treat my allergy?

Your doctor will want to do an allergy test to help determine exactly what is causing your allergy. An allergy skin test puts tiny amounts of allergens onto your skin to see which ones you react to. Or, your doctor may decide to do a blood test, such as the radioallergosorbent test (called RAST) or the ImmunoCap test.

How many shots will I have to get?

Quite a few. You will start getting shots 1 or 2 times each week. After about 6 months of weekly shots, your doctor will decide when you can start maintenance treatment. Maintenance shots are usually given just once each month, year round. You'll probably need to get maintenance shots for 3 to 5 years. Then you may be able to stop having shots.

Are allergy shots harmful?

Allergy shots are usually safe. But because allergy shots contain small amounts of an allergen you might have an allergic reaction to the shot itself. One common reaction to allergy shots is swelling at the place where the shot is given.

Some people can also have severe, shock-like reactions to an allergy shot. This type of reaction is called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is rare but very serious. If you get your shots on schedule (every week or every month), you're less likely to have this kind of reaction.

In case you have a bad reaction, your doctor will have you stay at the office for about 20 minutes every time you get your shot. That way, if you have a reaction to the shot, your doctor can give you something right away to stop it.

How long after I start taking the allergy shots before I feel better?

It usually takes 6 months or more of shots before you start feeling better and notice relief of your allergy symptoms. If you don't feel better after this time, you should probably talk with your doctor about another kind of treatment for your allergies.

Special Instructions:

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Adult and Pediatric Allergy and Asthma Care

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Immunotherapy (Allergy Shots) Information Sheet

- Allergy Shots are very effective for allergies, but not a cure.
- Allergy Shots may reduce the need for medication in the future.
- Most people respond very well to shots and they are 70-95% effective. However, a few individuals may not see much improvement.
- Depending on how many allergies you have, you may receive 1-3 individual injections per visit.
- It often takes 3-6 months to see improvement in symptoms.
- We start out giving shots frequently, this is safer and allows us to increase the strength more rapidly.
- The dosing and frequency is performed in response to each individual and how you react to the shots. The dosing schedule is subject to change for these reasons.
- You will receive one set of shots each week for 32 weeks, then
- You will receive one set of shots every 3-4 weeks.
- We usually continue allergy shots for 3-5 years and then repeat the skin tests. Depending on whether or not you are improved and having fewer symptoms we may continue or discontinue the shots.
- Most insurance companies and Medicare/Medicaid pay a portion of serum and shot charges.
- If you live out of Missoula or Kalispell you may get your shots done at another doctor's office.
- You do not need an appointment to get your shots done at either of our offices.

Allergy Shot Hours (Missoula)

Monday	8 AM – 4:30 PM
Tuesday	8 AM – 7:00 PM
Thursday	8 AM – 4:30 PM
Friday	8 AM – 4:30 PM

Allergy Shot Hours (Kalispell)

Wednesday	9 AM – 4:30 PM
Thursday	9 AM – 4:30 PM

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Immunotherapy Safety Guidelines

- You should not be given a shot if you have been ill, have an infection, or if your allergies or asthma are worse. Notify the person giving the shot prior to the injection if you have not been well.
- You should inform the person giving the shot if you had any type of reaction to your previous shot, whether or not you think it is significant.
- All shots must be performed in a medical office. No exceptions.
- All patients must remain in the medical office for 30 minutes after the shot. For patients who get their shots in our office, THIS IS MANDATORY. If you must leave prior to 30 minutes you must sign an Against Medical Advice form and you may no longer receive allergy shots from us.
- When the person gives you the injection they should always double check the dosage. It is a good idea for you to confirm the dosage with them.
- After the needle is inserted, the person giving the shot should always attempt to pull back on the plunger to make sure the needle is not in a blood vessel.
- If you have gone more than the allotted time between doses, the dosage should be decreased, never increased.
- You should not receive allergy injections if you are taking blood pressure medications which are beta blockers.
- If you or the nurse is unsure about anything...call our office. When in doubt...DO NOT RECEIVE THE SHOT.