

INJECTION IMMUNOTHERAPY PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is specific immunotherapy?

Most allergies are due to an over-reaction of the immune system to foreign material such as pollens, house dust, animal dander etc. These materials are called allergens. Specific immunotherapy or desensitisation is a treatment in which we inject you with small amounts of the allergen that causes your symptoms in order to improve the body's tolerance of these allergens. Promoting the body's tolerance of the allergens that cause your allergy should help to improve your symptoms.

What types of allergies can be treated?

In the UK we offer this treatment mainly for allergic rhinitis, and for patients with life-threatening allergic reactions to bee and wasp stings. Immunotherapy is not useful for treating eczema or food allergies. In other countries it is given for asthma

What does the treatment involve?

Carefully calculated amounts of allergen are given by injection. To start with, we build up your tolerance by giving increasing amounts of allergen at weekly intervals over a period of two to three months in most cases we then give a maintenance dose every 4-6 weeks for up to three years. For some seasonal allergies the weekly injections can simply be repeated pre-seasonally for three years. At each visit the doctor will record details of your preceding injection and symptoms you may have had. After each injection you must be observed in the clinic from about 30- 60 minutes. If you feel unwell after the injection you may be asked to stay a little longer until the doctor is happy for you to leave.

What is the response to the treatment?

The response to treatment is variable. Some people improve greatly with this treatment and may even lose their symptoms altogether. However, others only show a partial response and a few do not respond at all to treatment. We recommend that you continue to take your antihistamines and nasal sprays whilst you are receiving immunotherapy, at least until you see some improvement in your symptoms. You should then be

able to gradually reduce your medication. If in doubt, please feel free to discuss this with your doctor or the immunotherapy nurse.

Patients with bee or wasp sting allergies should continue to carry their Epipen/Anapen adrenaline injection device all the time. Although immunotherapy will protect most patients completely from the effects of future stings, there is still a small chance (about 1 in 20) of developing an allergic reaction from stings.

Are there any adverse reactions to the treatment?

After the injection, a small local reaction will sometimes appear in the form of a swelling with redness. In some cases the swelling may be quite large and may even be accompanied by nose or chest symptoms. These will usually settle on their own or with an antihistamine but if you are concerned, you should contact a doctor. Local reactions are not a reason to stop the treatment, but some adjustment may be made to the dosage. Rarely, small nodules may appear under the skin at the site of the injection. These do no harm and the treatment may be continued.

Serious reactions to immunotherapy are very rare but can occur during the first half-hour following your injection. In the past some people died when they had serious reactions and were not treated quickly enough. This is why we ask you to stay for around 30 - 60 minutes after each injection. The medical staff in the clinic are experienced in treating this sort of reaction and will deal with them if necessary. Sometimes people have some delayed symptoms. Mostly these are minor – headaches, stuffy nose etc, but you should seek medical help if they are troublesome.

Is there anything that I should not do after my injection?

During the 24 hours following the injection you should avoid any form of strenuous physical exercise and hot bathing. These activities are said to increase the risk of delayed reactions.

Can I have this treatment if I am pregnant?

We will not start immunotherapy if you are already pregnant or if you are trying to conceive. However, if you become pregnant whilst you are already well-established on maintenance injections, treatment can be continued. You should discuss this with your doctor since there is still a small but real risk of having a severe allergic reaction during treatment and this might affect the baby's health.

What should I do if I develop a new illness or am put on a new drug?

You should inform the doctor at the clinic if you have been told that you have a new illness or if you have started a new medication. Sometimes the treatment has to be stopped. Injections should not be given at the same time as vaccinations. We usually recommend

leaving a week between vaccinations and immunotherapy injections. Injections are also not recommended during 'colds' or chest infections. If in doubt, please speak to the nurse or the doctor at the immunotherapy clinic.

Useful telephone numbers:

Clinic :

Specialist nurse :

Please feel free to discuss with the doctor at the clinic if you have any queries or need further information.