

Are Allergy Shots Really Necessary? Why Sublingual Immunotherapy is Preferable to Shot Immunotherapy

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Allergy shots, otherwise known as shot immunotherapy, have been around since 1911. Receiving allergy shots under the skin has been one of the most effective ways to treat patients who suffer from allergic diseases.

Shot immunotherapy can do two things for those who choose to endure it. First, it can relieve symptoms within the first 3-6 months of therapy. Second, shot immunotherapy can down regulate the immune system and desensitize the patient to the things that he or she might be allergic to. Studies have revealed that this can be accomplished in ninety percent of patients in 3-5 years with long lasting symptom relief after the therapy has been terminated. Another benefit of immunotherapy is that it often reduces or eliminates the need for daily medication.

Immunotherapy, however, is not without its disadvantages. Due to the danger of giving the patient what they are allergic to in the form of a shot under the skin, most allergists require their patients to receive the allergy injections in their offices in case of a severe of life-threatening reaction. In addition, patients are required to wait in their allergist's office for at least twenty minutes after the injection. As a result of these inconveniences, many who need immunotherapy go on suffering needlessly due to their inability to get to their allergist's office once or twice a week for the next 3-5 years.

Fortunately, though, there is new ways to administer immunotherapy that is safe, convenient, and effective. Sublingual immunotherapy, which is immunotherapy administered in the form of drops underneath the tongue, has been done for many decades in Europe. As recently as 1998, a panel of international allergy experts, who acted on behalf of the World Health organization (WHO), concluded that sublingual immunotherapy is a viable alternative to shot immunotherapy.

Although sublingual therapy has not yet been approved by the FDA in the United States, this form of allergy treatment is starting to be utilized widely. The initial costs of sublingual immunotherapy are higher than that of shot immunotherapy. The reason for this is that sublingual immunotherapy is given at higher doses. However, the long term costs of sublingual immunotherapy will be much lower. The expenses of needles, syringes, and nursing care associated with shot immunotherapy are associated with shot immunotherapy are eliminated with the sublingual approach. Consequently, the savings to insurance companies will be substantial. Also, the vials for sublingual immunotherapy are prepared in similar fashion to shot immunotherapy.

To summarize, there are three reasons why sublingual immunotherapy is preferable to shot immunotherapy:

1. Cost With the elimination of nursing care, syringes, and needles, most insurance companies will save several hundred dollars per year for patients that receive sublingual immunotherapy as opposed to shot immunotherapy.
2. Convenience Due to the risk of severe and possibly life threatening reactions, shot immunotherapy requires weekly or twice weekly injection in the office. Plus, patients are required to wait at least twenty minutes after the injection before they can leave. Sublingual immunotherapy, on the other hand, can be taken home and administered daily. This is much more convenient for allergy patients.
3. Greater safety To date, no deaths or serious reactions to sublingual immunotherapy have been reported. The sublingual approach is safe.

Most medicines and therapies have risks and side effects, and sublingual immunotherapy is no exception. The most common side effects of sublingual immunotherapy are itching of the mouth or face and gastrointestinal problems such as nausea and vomiting. These side effects, though, are rare. Plus, recent studies have shown that the vast majority of these side effects can be managed by temporarily reducing the dose administered.

When all factors are considered such as cost, convenience, and safety, the evidence indicates that sublingual immunotherapy is the most effective way to treat allergies.