



# Hay Fever: Allergy Shot? Worth a Shot!

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Asthma & Allergy Relief

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Do you suffer from frequent sneezing, congestion and an itchy or runny nose? If so, you may have allergic rhinitis or “hay fever.” Allergic rhinitis is one of the most common chronic conditions, affecting 10 percent to 30 percent of adults and up to 40 percent of children in the United States. If this includes you, you don’t have to suffer.

Drs. Mian and Johnson with Gateway Asthma & Allergy at Esse Health can make an accurate diagnosis and develop a treatment plan that works for you. If you have allergic rhinitis, you may be wondering if allergy shots are the best treatment for you. While getting regular shots is not anyone’s idea of fun, the possibility of being free from your allergy symptoms may be worth it!

Allergy shots, also known as immunotherapy, may be considered if your symptoms are constant, if you do not want to take medications or feel that they are not enough, or if you want long-term control of your allergies with less need for medications. This treatment involves receiving individually customized allergy injections periodically, as determined by Drs. Mian and Johnson. The end result is decreased sensitivity to allergens.

Allergies are the result of a chain reaction that starts in the immune system. Your immune system controls how your body defends itself. For instance, if you have an allergy to pollen, your immune system identifies pollen as an invader, or *allergen*. Your immune system overreacts by producing antibodies called *Immunoglobulin E (IgE)*. These antibodies travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction leading to red, itchy eyes, a runny and stuffy nose and worsening of cough and allergic asthma.

Allergy shots are individually customized and aimed at increasing your tolerance to allergens that trigger your symptoms every time you are exposed to them. Drs. Mian and Johnson are specialized physicians (allergists) that can test which allergy you have and determine if allergy shots are the best treatment.

## Who can be Treated with Shots?

Allergy shots are recommended for patients with allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis/conjunctivitis and stinging insect allergy. They are not recommended for food allergies. Before a decision is made to begin allergy shots, the following issues must be considered:

1. Length of allergy season and the severity of your symptoms.
2. Whether medications and/or changes to your environment can control your allergy symptoms.
3. Your desire to avoid long-term medication use.

Note: Immunotherapy for children is effective and often well-tolerated. It might prevent the onset of new allergen sensitivities or the progression to asthma.

## How do Allergy Shots Work?

Allergy shots work like a vaccine. Your body responds to the injected amounts of a particular allergen (given in gradually increasing doses) little by little, developing a resistance and tolerance to it. Allergy shots can lead to decreased, minimal or no allergy symptoms when you are again exposed to the allergen(s) in the shot.

There generally are two phases to immunotherapy: build-up and maintenance.

**The build-up phase**, generally ranging from three to six months, involves receiving injections with increasing amounts of the allergens. The frequency of injections is once or twice a week, though more rapid build-up schedules are sometimes used.

**The maintenance phase** begins when the most effective dose is reached. This dose is different for everyone, depending on how allergic you are and your response to the build-up phase. Once the maintenance dose is reached, there are longer periods between injections, typically two to four weeks.

## Hay Fever: Allergy Shot? Worth a Shot! Continued

### Cluster Immunotherapy

Dr. Mian, located in O'Fallon, Mo., offers an accelerated immunotherapy regimen called "cluster immunotherapy." This involves giving two or more allergy shots at each visit, usually spaced apart by 20 to 30 minutes. This procedure is performed once a week and allows for a person to get to his or her maintenance dose much quicker and experience relief faster. Cluster immunotherapy offers an alternative to traditional schedules for allergy shots, allowing a person to achieve higher doses of allergy vaccines much quicker, but keeping the same safety profile as traditional immunotherapy. Patients have reported benefits within the first four to eight weeks of starting cluster immunotherapy regimen.

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