Living Better with Allergies

• Getting ready for allergy season, how do allergy shots work?

Back in 1911, Dr. Noon noticed that administering doses of grass pollen extract to his patients reduced eye sensitivity symptoms to grass pollen. Since then, based on that observation, allergy immunotherapy has been used widespread to treat allergic disease. So, what are allergy shots and how do they work? Allergy immunotherapy or allergy injection, is a form of prolonged treatment process of repeated administration of protein extracts of pollens, spores and other allergen sources that are administered to patients who suffer from hay fever, eye, ear allergy (allergic otitis media), stinging insect allergy or allergic asthma. The process of repeated administration of these injections is called desensitization and its administered in a build-up fashion, which I call the “baby steps” because we start with very small doses up to the higher doses that produce immunologic and clinical effects. Basically what we are trying to achieve by desensitizing patients, is allowing the immune system to get to a specific maintenance dose without having an allergic reaction, I call it achieving tolerance. Once this maintenance dose is achieved, the allergy injections are spaced out to every 4 weeks, significant allergy symptoms can be improved within a matter of months. Clinical benefits of reduced allergic symptoms increase for several years after the maximal doses are achieved. Allergy injections can be administered to children (based on age and maturity level) and adults, and are the only treatment that changes the immune system and cures allergies. They also prevent new allergies and asthma from developing and there is new data about also helping with eczema. Allergy injections have a long lasting beneficial effect, well after the therapy is complete. They are FDA approved and it’s a natural way to allow your immune system to build tolerance and reduce allergic symptoms. In addition, previous studies have shown that they are also more cost effective than allergy medications long term without all the side effects. Ideally, a patient who has allergic symptoms, should be seen by a board-certified allergist for evaluation of their allergies via skin testing. Based on the allergy test results, a board-certified allergist will develop a particular Allergy Action Plan personalized for that patient’s particular allergies. In addition, a discussion about avoidance of aeroallergen strategies, medical therapies and allergy injections are part of that consultation. For more tips and tricks about allergy shots, or if you are interested in being evaluated for allergies, please visit us at The Asthma and Allergy Clinic of Dr. Sweeney and Palacios-Kibler. Also feel free to check out our recently updated website for more information at asthmaandallergyva.com.