

## **TREATMENT CHOICES FOR ALLERGIES**

### **How do we treat allergies?**

Allergies are treated in three different ways. This includes avoidance, medications, and immunotherapy. Once you have tested positive for inhalant allergies then we can determine strategies to avoid coming in contact with your specific sources of allergies. For example, if you are allergic to dust mites, then you might benefit from using a mite-proof mattress and pillow case. Avoidance can make a big difference for some people so you should learn about avoidance strategies.

The second way that we treat allergies is with medications. Common medications include antihistamines, nasal steroid sprays, and decongestants. Proper use of medications can relieve symptoms in many people but some people do not tolerate the common allergy medications.

### **Traditional allergy injections:**

Finally, if avoidance strategies and medications are inadequate then immunotherapy should be considered. Immunotherapy involves exposing your body to small amounts of the specific allergy extracts that are causing you problems. For many years in the United States, this has been done with weekly allergy shots in the doctor's office. This method is "tried and true" and is used by allergists every day throughout this county. It is effective and carries minimal risk when done properly. The shots work because the dose of the extracts is slowly increased over time and your immune system becomes desensitized to the allergens. The shots must initially be given in your doctor's office because of the small chance of a serious allergic reaction. Eventually, maintenance doses will be reached and it may be possible for patients to administer the injections to themselves at home. The success of this technique is dependent on receiving regularly scheduled doses over time. This leads to improvement in symptoms, which is the goal of therapy. This form of treatment is usually covered by insurance plans.

### **Sublingual allergy drops:**

Instead of injections, the allergy extracts can be placed in the form of drops under the tongue. The dose of the extract is increased over time and it has been shown to improve allergy symptoms and decrease medication use. Sublingual drops appear to be safer than traditional allergy injections **so the drops can be given at home**. Obviously, this is much more convenient than weekly injections in the doctor's office. Your doctor's office will give you the allergy dropper bottle with the extracts and teach you how to give them. You will have a simple schedule that you follow that tells you how many drops to give. You will have a follow-up appointment every six weeks to be sure that you are getting better. Eventually, you will reach maintenance doses and your follow-up appointments can be less frequent. Like allergy injections, the duration of treatment needs to be from 2-3 years (sometimes more) to achieve the best results.

In the United States, sublingual drops are becoming more common. In Europe, sublingual drops have been used for many years with a good record of safety and clear benefit in improving allergy symptoms. However, most insurance plans in the United States will not pay for allergy drops. In our clinic we feel that sublingual drops are a good option for many people. Therefore, we offer services for preparation and dispensing allergy extracts for sublingual drops at a very reasonable cost.