

Subcutaneous Immunotherapy

What is subcutaneous immunotherapy?

Subcutaneous immunotherapy (SCIT) is a treatment that helps prevent allergic reactions to environmental allergens (such as dust mites, tree pollens, pets, grass and even bee venom allergies). This involves injecting incremental doses of an allergen over a long period of time.

The process typically involves weekly injections for six months, followed by monthly injections for another three to five years. Through SCIT, the immune system becomes less sensitive to the allergen substance over time and thus reduces the allergy symptoms.

Instructions and precautions for subcutaneous immunotherapy:

- Beta-blocker medication, taken for high blood pressure or migraine headaches, must **not** be used with your injections
- If you have concerns about receiving injections due to your religious beliefs, please inform us
- Because the risk of a systemic allergic reaction never goes away, you must remain in the clinic for 30 minutes after **every** injection appointment, in case of a reaction
- Do not perform any strenuous exercise one hour before, or two hours after, your injection
- If you have a fever, are not well enough to go to work/school, or are experiencing an asthma flare-up, do not get an injection until you are no longer experiencing symptoms for at least one full day
- Do not rub the injection site- this will make the swelling worse. If you have issues with swelling, take an antihistamine at least one hour before receiving your injection, to help decrease swelling at the injection site
- If you think you might be pregnant, tell your doctor or nurse. SCIT is generally safe during pregnancy; however, the dosage should not be increased. Your doctor may wish to reduce the dose while you are pregnant
- You will be provided with an injection schedule and must have it with you before you can receive your injection
- Be sure to tell the nurse or doctor of any reactions from your last injection and/or if there have been any changes to your medication use
- If you are provided with an allergy extract to bring home with you, it should be refrigerated between injections, but never frozen.
- Injections after the initial six months are usually administered by your family physician, however if you are experiencing issues with your reactions, you can continue to receive SCIT within our Allergy Clinic

- The cost of the allergy serum is not covered by OHIP however, most drug plans will cover the cost

Bee Venom Immunotherapy

Bee venom immunotherapy involves a 'build-up' phase over several visits to the Allergy Clinic, during a one to two week timeframe (typically four visits in total). The build-up phase starts with a low dose of bee venom and increases to a maintenance dose.

Once the build-up phase is complete, you will receive a dosing schedule that your family doctor will continue to administer. These injections are given every four to five weeks for the first year, then continue regularly for the next five years.

If you miss or delay your injections by more than two weeks, your family doctor might require you to return to our Allergy Clinic for an adjustment of your dose.

Side effects of bee venom immunotherapy may include:

- Headache or fatigue for one to two days, following your injection
- Mild swelling, redness and itching around the injection site. You can help to reduce swelling/redness by elevating your arm and applying ice to the area. You may also take a non-sedating antihistamine (such as Claritin, Reactine, Allegra or Aerius)
- If a more serious reaction occurs, go to your nearest Emergency Department

Questions regarding subcutaneous immunotherapy?

Please contact St. Joseph's Allergy Clinic at: 519 646-6100 ext. 61353.