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Allergy Drops: What is Sublingual Immunotherapy?

Sublingual immunotherapy, or SLIT, is a form of immunotherapy that involves putting drops of allergen extracts under the tongue. Many people refer to this process as “allergy drops,” and it is an alternative treatment for allergy shots. This form of immunotherapy has been used for years in Europe and recently has had increased interest in the United States.

Allergy drops entail placing drops of allergen extracts under than tongue and then swallowing the extract. It allows the body to eventually become tolerant of the allergen by absorbing the allergen through the stomach lining.

One of the significant benefits of allergy drops is that the patient can take the drops at home. Patients may know if they are getting benefits from the drops within three to six months. The drops are administered daily over a period of months to years.

Allergy drops have been proven to work for allergic rhinitis and allergic conjunctivitis (hayfever like symptoms) and to a lesser extent allergic asthma. It is commonly prescribed in Europe to treat those ailments.

What is the Safety of Allergy Drops?

Over the past 10 years, the safety of SLIT has been well documented. Serious and fatal reactions to SLIT have not been reported to date. Mild side effects, such as an itchy mouth, occur in the majority of people, and moderate side effects have been documented (1 in about every 12,000 doses), including:

- lip, mouth and tongue irritation
- eye itching, redness and swelling
- nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping and diarrhea
- sneezing, nasal itching and congestion
- asthma symptoms
- hives or swelling

Because of the safety of SLIT, people generally treat themselves at home, and are followed in the clinic at close intervals to monitor response to treatment.

Allergy Shots versus Allergy Drops?

Allergy shots have been around in the U.S. for many years and numerous studies have proven its benefit. Studies now are just starting on allergy drops in the U.S. and we await those results. Therefore, allergy shots are FDA approved in which allergy drops are not. There are still some questions on the correct dosages and the mixing of allergens together. Still, it is well prescribed in Europe and is an excellent option for those who cannot be on allergy injections due to time constraints, needle phobia, or medications that may prevent allergy shots.

If you are symptomatic on medication, environmental changes and allergy shots are not an option, then consider allergy drops.

For any questions, please ask Dr. Chacko or a member of his staff