

## **What is sublingual immunotherapy (or allergy drops)?**

Unlike most allergy drugs, which only treat symptoms temporarily, sublingual immunotherapy addresses the underlying cause of allergies. Allergy drops are administered under the tongue in gradually increasing dosages until the patient develops long-term tolerance to the allergy-causing substance.

## **What is an antigen?**

An antigen is an allergy-causing substance. Examples include dust, pollen, mold, insect venom, and specific foods such as dairy, peanuts, fish, wheat, corn, and eggs.

## **What kind of allergies can be treated with allergy drops?**

One benefit of allergy drops is that they can treat a broad range of allergies, including those caused by dust mites, pollen, mold, animals, foods, and seasonal allergies such as grass, trees, and ragweed.

## **Who should take allergy drops?**

Although most allergy sufferers can benefit from allergy drops, they're especially ideal for people who can't tolerate or don't respond to allergy shots, as well as those who are unable to commit to allergy shot therapy. These people include:

- Infants and children\*
- Asthmatics
- People whose medical conditions prevent them from pursuing other allergy treatment
- Those who are needle phobic
- Those with chronic conditions including sinusitis
- Those with food and mold allergies
- Those with multiple allergies including dust, pollen, foods, and animal

\*Allergy drops have proven especially helpful for children with eczema and recurrent ear infections, which often have underlying allergic causes. Research shows that many children with untreated eczema and allergies often develop asthma and other chronic conditions later in life, so treating them early can have life-long benefits and may prevent development of other allergies and asthma.

## **Are allergy drops safe? Is there research validating their effectiveness?**

Allergy drops have been used around the world for more than 100 years, and numerous studies validate both the safety and effectiveness. The World Health Organization has endorsed sublingual immunotherapy as a viable alternative to allergy shots. The Cochrane Collaboration, the world's most-trusted international organization dedicated to reviewing healthcare treatments, concluded that allergy drop immunotherapy significantly reduced allergy symptoms and the use of allergy medications. In 2013, the Agency for Healthcare Quality Research published a review that examined studies which used both sublingual and subcutaneous immunotherapy (allergy shot) treatments. Reviewers found sufficient evidence to support the effectiveness and safety of subcutaneous **and** sublingual immunotherapy for the treatment of allergic rhinitis (hay fever) and asthma.

## **What are the advantages of allergy drops?**

In addition to being a viable option for people of all ages, there are other advantages to allergy drops:

- **Lower cost, fewer clinic visits.** Compared to shots, allergy drops typically cost less and require fewer clinic visits. Most patients receiving allergy drops need only a few clinic visits the first year, and then once every 6-12 months thereafter until visits are no longer needed.
- **More convenient.** You can take allergy drops at home or wherever you are, making it much easier to stay with your treatment.
- **Less medication.** Our patients report, and research confirms, that they typically need less medication to control symptoms after beginning allergy drops.
- **Enjoy healthier days.** The end benefit of taking drops consistently? Feeling better. Patients typically report fewer clinic visits, hospitalizations, and less time lost from work and school.



## **Will my medical insurance cover the costs?**

Insurance companies may cover the cost of office visits and diagnostic testing. However, because allergy drops are an off-label use of FDA-approved antigens, they are not typically covered by insurance. Allergy drops do qualify for Health Savings Account or Flex Spending reimbursement. Most patients agree that the investment in allergy drops is well worth the lasting results and improvement in their quality of life, and the monthly costs are typically comparable to copays for prescriptions and injection immunotherapy.

## **I've heard that allergy drops are not approved by the FDA. Is that safe?**

First, it's important to understand that the antigens used in allergy drops are the same FDA-approved antigens used in allergy shots. They're also prepared the same way as allergy shots. The difference is the route of administration — a dispenser that delivers a drop of antigen under the tongue versus a syringe injecting antigen into tissue. The FDA approves products, not therapies, so it's unlikely that it will ever "approve" multi-antigen immunotherapy.

Antigens are labeled by the FDA for single use through injections and some for sublingual immunotherapy. A number of FDA-approved biologics are considered off-label use when delivered via sublingual immunotherapy, which is both legal and highly common. Most physicians prescribe drugs in an off-label manner today, for example, the use of blood pressure medications for migraines, montelukasts for COPD, or arthritis drugs to treat shingles. Multiple antigen therapies for both injection and sublingual use are also an off-label use of FDA-approved biologics.

## **Why don't more patients receive allergy drops if they're so effective?**

Allergy drops are widely accepted as an effective treatment throughout the world. That acceptance is growing in the U.S. as the treatment becomes more widely available and providers are better educated about its benefits.

## **What are the ingredients in sublingual immunotherapy?**

Each prescription is a custom solution for each patient according to the type and severity of his or her allergy. Drop prescriptions contain custom concentrates of the allergen the patient is found to be allergic to upon testing. Antigens are put into a glycerin solution for stability. There are no additional preservatives.

## **How long will I need to take my drops?**

Most patients take allergy drops three times daily for three to five years, but it varies according to the severity of the allergies, seasonality, and how adherent they are to treatment. Many patients begin to see symptom improvement within a few weeks to months but need to keep using the drops through the full course of therapy to get long-term benefit.

## **How do I order my drops?**

Allergy drop prescriptions need to be ordered by a licensed prescriber who will monitor your treatment progress and dose based on your progress. Allergy drops using the La Crosse Method™ Protocol are dosed and adjusted over time based on your specific allergy test results rather than one-size-fits-all treatment. This highly customized approach helps to ensure maximum safety and effectiveness for each patient. It also helps to reduce the likelihood of treatment side effects and severe reactions that have been noted with other treatment approaches that may begin at a higher dose regardless of patient sensitivity.

## **How long can I expect the effects of allergy drops to last?**

A benefit of immunotherapy, whether allergy shots or allergy drops, is that it can alter the course of allergic disease by treating the root cause, not just the symptoms. Once tolerance is built, it can be permanent for many patients. Key studies have been conducted to explore the long-lasting effect of allergy drops, including a 10-year study on children with asthma that demonstrated drops maintained effectiveness long after treatment stopped.

But even the best treatments won't work if you don't stay with them. Like allergy shot treatment, it's important to stay with allergy drop treatment until your provider has determined it can be discontinued to give you the best chance of long-term effectiveness.

