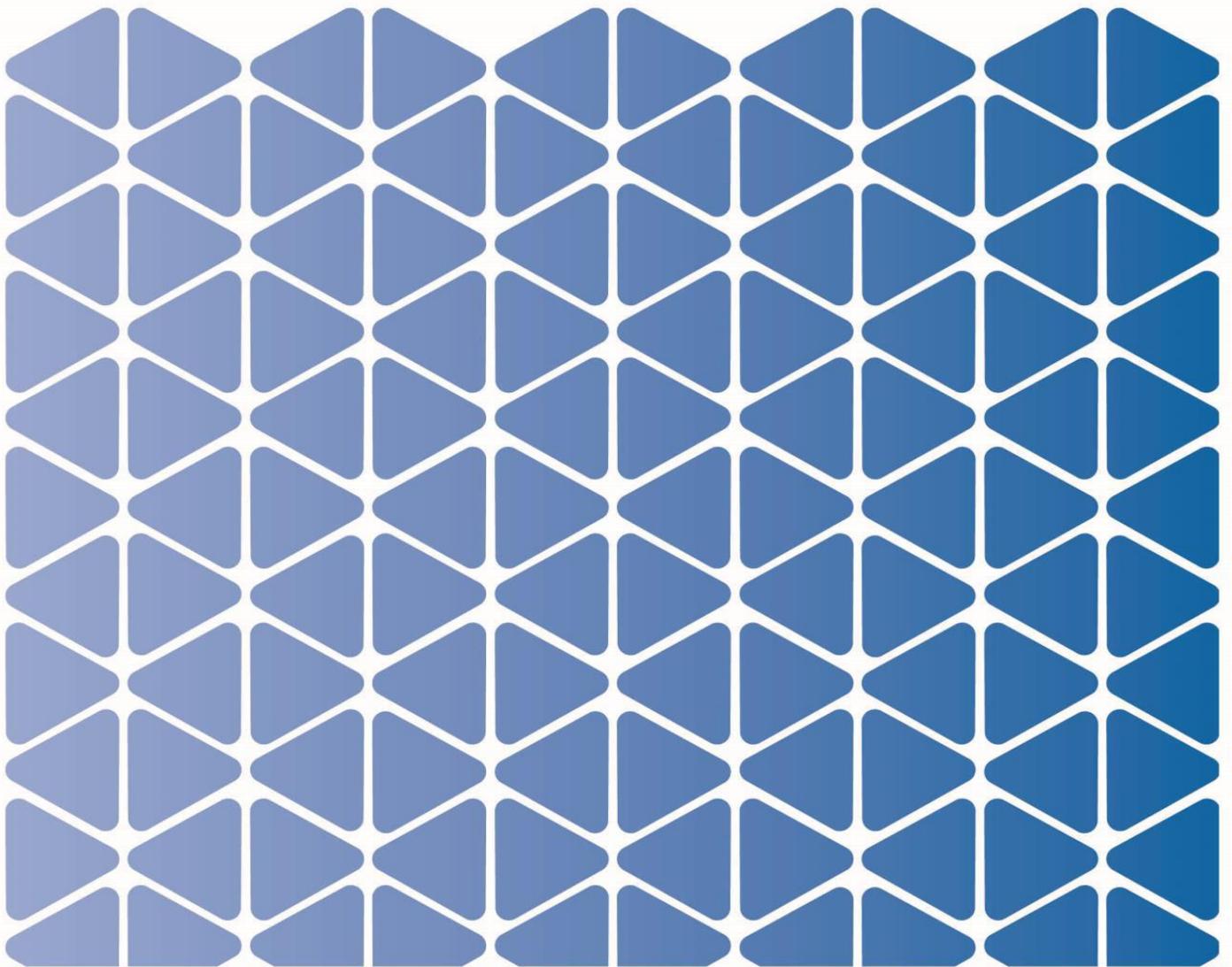




PATIENT INFORMATION

SUBLINGUAL IMMUNOTHERAPY



What is immunotherapy?

When people meet something that they are allergic to (an allergen), their body responds by causing swelling and irritation. For many people with allergy, this occurs intermittently, with annoying but limited symptoms that are usually successfully managed with simple treatments, like antihistamines, eye drops or nasal sprays.

However, some people who suffer with allergy may have significant symptoms which aren't controlled by standard treatment, e.g. severe hay fever. For these people, immunotherapy offers the opportunity to adapt the body's response to an allergen, so that symptoms are less severe or don't happen at all.

Treatment involves giving the person small doses of the thing that they are allergic to. As the immunotherapy starts to work, the body becomes able to tolerate the allergen.

Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) is given by mouth as a tablet or a liquid that goes under the tongue. If people are being treated for pollen, dust mite or animal allergy, sublingual treatment is the option of choice. However, we cannot use sublingual immunotherapy to treat bee and wasp allergy, and not all pollen and animal allergens are available in tablet or liquid form. In these cases immunotherapy treatment is given as an injection instead.

Pollen, dust mite and animal immunotherapy

There are several different products available for sub-lingual immunotherapy. Only one product (Grazax) is licenced in the UK. The other products are widely used in Europe and are available in the UK on a "named patient" basis. The treatment may be used on a regular basis for some products, while others are taken intermittently.

1. Daily treatment. Either a tablet or some liquid drops are taken daily, for three years. The first dose is given in clinic, to make sure that the person is comfortable taking it. After that, the treatment is taken at home. People are seen in clinic every three months to check how they are getting on and to supply more medication.
2. Intermittent treatment: Some pollen products, either liquids or tablets, are only taken immediately before and during the pollen season. There is then a break in treatment for about six months, before treatment is re-started ready for the next pollen season. Treatment is usually continued for a total of three seasons. The first treatment dose each season is given in clinic. After that, the treatment is taken at home. People are seen in clinic in the middle and at the end of each season's treatment to check on their progress.

Benefits of pollen, dust mite and animal immunotherapy

For those who experience severe allergy symptoms which are not controlled by standard medication, immunotherapy offers the potential for long term reduction in allergy symptoms. This can have a huge impact on people's quality of life.

The alternative to having immunotherapy is to continue using combinations of antihistamines, nasal sprays and eye drops to ease the symptoms.

Risks of Immunotherapy:

As with any medical treatment, immunotherapy can have some side effects. These range from the common and mild, to rare but severe effects.

Common side effects:

- 1) **Itching and swelling of the lips, mouth or tongue.** These are very common side effects, but they are usually mild and settle down quickly. They are most likely to occur with the first dose of treatment. If they do continue beyond the first dose, they commonly settle down as the treatment goes on, and people rarely have problems after the first month. Where the symptoms occur, they are easily managed by taking an antihistamine before having the treatment.
- 2) **Tiredness.** Some people feel tired or a little "off colour" when they start treatment. This should settle down with time.
- 3) **Stomach ache, indigestion.** Because some of the medication is swallowed, people may find that they get some stomach ache when they first start taking the treatment. Taking an antihistamine before having treatment will help and the symptoms will gradually settle down as the treatment goes on.

More serious side effects:

As immunotherapy deliberately contains a product that the person is allergic to, it is possible to have an allergic reaction to the treatment. The vast majority of people find that they tolerate SLIT very well, having only mild side effects (if any at all). However, it is possible for more serious side effects such as itchiness, rash, runny or itchy nose, cough or wheeziness. It is also possible for people to have a very serious, sudden allergic reaction, called **anaphylaxis**, though this is very rare indeed. To ensure that you can tolerate the treatment safely, you will be asked to stay in the clinic for **one hour** after your first dose, so we can monitor how you are. If you notice any problems with any of the symptoms listed above, you should tell the clinic nurse straight away so that we can treat this for you.

There are some things that make an allergic reaction more likely. For example, some medications increase the risk of you having a reaction to the immunotherapy. The two types of medication which are a particular concern are **ACE inhibitors** and **beta blockers**, both of these can be used to treat high blood pressure and some heart diseases. It is not safe for you to have immunotherapy if you use either of these types of medication. If you know that you use ACE inhibitors or beta blockers, or if you are receiving treatment for high blood pressure or heart problems you will need to discuss the treatment options with your GP or your consultant. Please **DO NOT STOP** your treatment without having a full discussion with a doctor.

Having an area of broken skin in your mouth, e.g. a mouth ulcer or after a tooth extraction will also increase your risk of reaction. You should not take your treatment if you have a damaged area in your mouth. You will usually need to stop treatment for about a week if you have a mouth ulcer or after the removal of a tooth.

People who suffer with asthma are more likely to experience anaphylaxis if they have an allergic reaction to their treatment. It is important that you let us know if you have ever been diagnosed with asthma (even if it is not a problem for you now).

Contact details

If you have any specific concerns that you feel have not been answered and need explaining, please contact the following.

- Adult Respiratory Nurse Specialist and Allergy Nurse Office (phone 01905 760255)
- Children and Young People: Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Allergy Service 01905 733957

Other information

The following internet website contain information that you may find useful.

- www.worcsacute.nhs.uk
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
- www.anaphylaxis.org.uk
Information on allergy and the management of anaphylaxis
- www.allergyuk.org
Information and fact sheets on allergy (including immunotherapy)
- www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
On-line health encyclopaedia

If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PET@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.