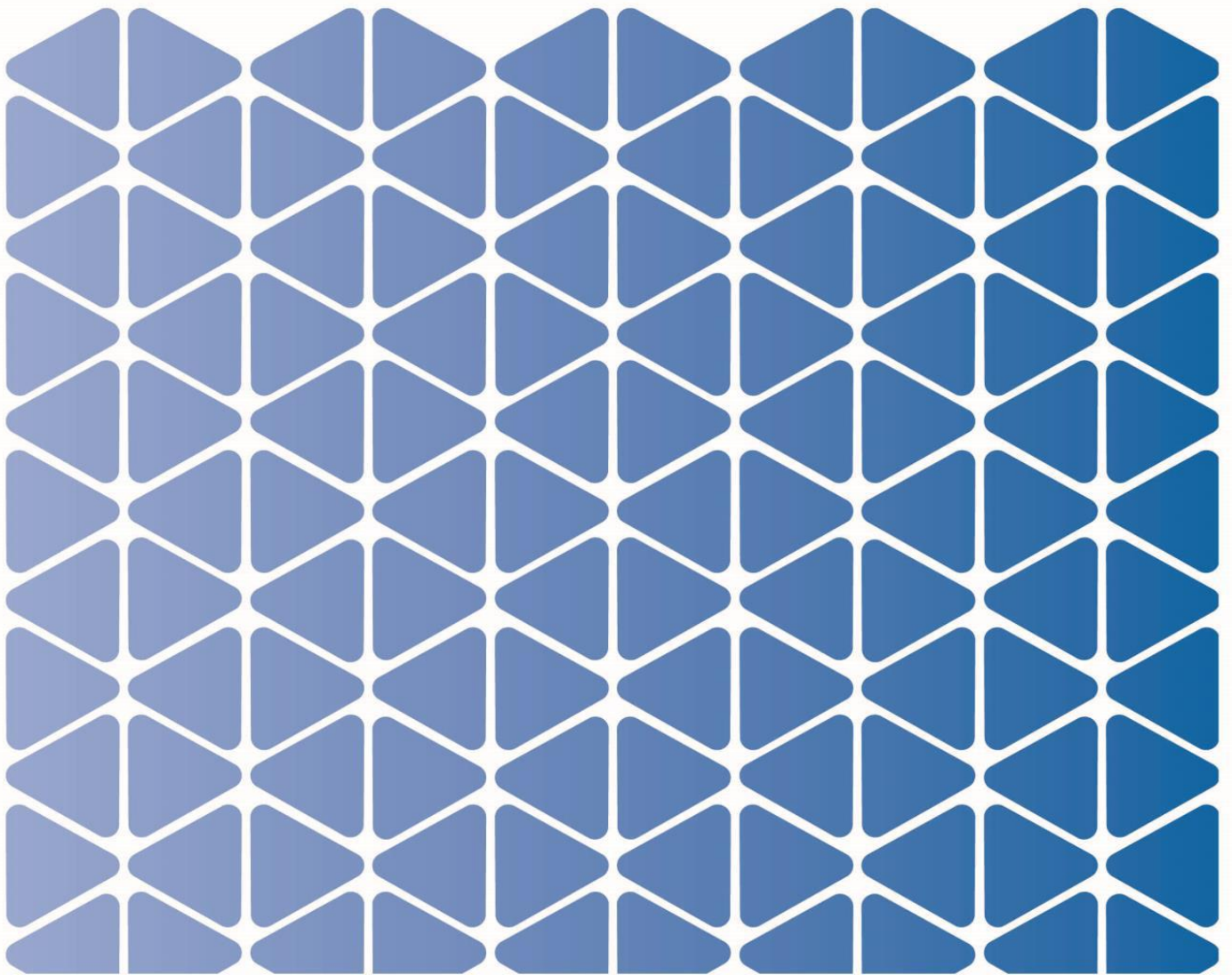


PATIENT INFORMATION

SUBCUTANEOUS 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 affecting just one or two parts of their body, e.g. people with grass pollen allergy may experience temporary problems with their eyes and nose. These symptoms are usually successfully managed with simple treatments, like antihistamines, eye drops or nasal sprays.

However, some people who suffer with allergy may have a serious reaction, which affects their whole body (anaphylaxis), e.g. those with wasp or bee venom allergy. Others 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 very small doses of the thing that they are allergic to, and gradually building up the dose. As the immunotherapy starts to work, the body becomes able to tolerate the allergen.

Sometimes immunotherapy treatment can be 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, this treatment route is the option of choice. However, we cannot use oral immunotherapy to treat bee and wasp allergy, so immunotherapy treatment is given as an injection instead.

Bee and wasp venom immunotherapy

Immunotherapy treatment is given by injection into the fatty (subcutaneous) tissue in the upper arm. This is done in the allergy clinic. People usually have one injection at each visit. We start by giving tiny doses of venom and gradually build the dose up. The injections need to be given on a weekly basis during this time. It usually takes twelve weeks to build up to the top treatment dose. Once the top treatment dose has been reached, the time interval between the injections is increased gradually. People still need to have regular injections though, which means attending the clinic every 4 – 6 weeks for three years.

Benefits of bee and wasp venom immunotherapy

For those who have had a potentially dangerous reaction after a wasp or bee sting and where blood or skin tests confirm that they have an allergy to wasp or bee venom, immunotherapy has the potential to protect against having a serious reaction if they are stung in future. This is potentially life-saving. Insect venom immunotherapy is very effective, giving 98% protection against severe wasp venom reactions and 80%

protection against severe bee venom reactions.

The alternative to having immunotherapy, is to use adrenaline injections after being stung and when an allergic reaction starts. However, this is not a complete treatment and the person would require an immediate medical review after using adrenaline. You may be advised to carry an adrenaline auto-injector until your course of immunotherapy is complete.

Pollen, dust mite and animal immunotherapy

Oral treatment is the option of choice for people who need this type of immunotherapy. It is easier to use, as the treatment can be taken at home and it is much safer than using injections. However, not all allergens are available as an oral treatment, particularly where people are being treated for more than one allergen. In this case, we use immunotherapy injections.

The injections are given into the fatty (subcutaneous) tissue in the upper arm. This is done in the allergy clinic. People usually have one injection at each visit. We start by giving a small dose of the allergen and then build the dose up. How quickly this dose build up happens depends on the allergen(s) that are being used. Some immunotherapy programs are quite quick, needing one injection every 2 – 3 weeks with just four doses in the course. Others need a weekly visit for up to 25 weeks, and then a monthly visit for up to 3 years. It is important that you discuss your treatment plan with the allergy team, as some of the treatment options have a huge time commitment.

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) **Discomfort, redness and swelling at the injection site.** Nearly everybody will experience this side effect at some point in their treatment. For most people, the

swelling and redness is mild and settles quickly. Redness and swelling may occur shortly after having the immunotherapy injection (when it is called an early response) or may happen within the 24 hours after the injection (late response). Taking antihistamine tablets and using an ice pack will help the swelling to settle. If the swelling lasts more than 48 hours or if the area of your arm that is swollen is larger than 6 x 6 cm, then please contact your allergy nurse on the phone numbers provided on page 3 of this leaflet.

- 2) **Tiredness.** Some people feel tired or a little “off colour” for the 24 hours after their immunotherapy injection. Avoiding strenuous activity or alcohol on the day of your injection will help to reduce this.

More serious side effects:

- 1) **Allergic reaction.** As immunotherapy deliberately contains a product that you are allergic to, it is possible for you to have an allergic reaction to the injection. To reduce discomfort from an allergic response you will usually be given an antihistamine tablet before you have your injection. The vast majority of people find that they tolerate the injection well after having this tablet. However, you will be asked to stay in the clinic for **one hour** after your injection, so we can monitor how you are. If you notice any problems with itchiness, rash, runny or itchy nose, cough or wheeziness, 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** (the name of these drugs usually ends in “PRIL” e.g. ramipril, captopril) and **beta blockers** (the name of these drugs usually ends on “LOL”, e.g. atenolol, propranolol) 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 infection will also increase your risk of reaction and we will not give you your immunotherapy injection if you feel unwell on the day. If you feel off colour on the day you are due for treatment, please use the contact numbers below for advice.

2) **Anaphylaxis.** It is possible for people to have a very serious, sudden allergic reaction to the immunotherapy. This is very rare. We take every care to tailor the treatment to your needs to ensure your safety and we ask you to stay in the clinic for an hour after your injection so we can treat you immediately if you become unwell.

People who suffer with asthma are more likely to experience anaphylaxis if they have an allergic reaction to their injection. 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.

- Respiratory Nurse Specialist and Allergy Nurse (phone 01905 760255)
- Paediatric Advanced Nurse Practitioner

Other information

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

- <https://www.bsaci.org/members/Immunotherapy.pdf>

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.