

# Subcutaneous Immunotherapy

Information and advice for patients

## Immunology

### What is subcutaneous immunotherapy?

Subcutaneous immunotherapy or desensitisation is an injection given in your arm, in increasing doses, with the allergen you are allergic to, in order to promote and improve your body's tolerance of that specific allergen. This improved tolerance should then help to improve your symptoms.

### What are the benefits?

Subcutaneous immunotherapy will aim to improve your allergic symptoms and in relation to venom allergy aims to reduce the potential severity of future stings.

### Are there any adverse reactions / risks with the treatment?

Side effects can occur although not everybody will get them. Severe reactions are rare. Local reactions are common and usually associated with injection site reactions (swelling, redness, pain and itching). Anti-histamines will usually reduce these localised reactions. Because of this risk each injection will be administered in hospital under supervision and you will be monitored for at least 1 hour after your injection.

If you experience serious side effects whilst on treatment you should contact us on the numbers below or your GP. In the event of an emergency you should attend your local A&E or call 999 for an ambulance.

### What are the risks of not having the treatment?

Your symptoms will remain the same, and in the case of venom allergy you could be exposed to future stings resulting in anaphylaxis.

### Are there any alternatives to this treatment?

Alternative treatment options will have already been trialled and deemed insufficient in controlling your symptoms.

## Preparing for the Treatment

Are there any precautions I should take before / after treatment?

On the day of your injection you should avoid strenuous exercise and hot baths as these activities can increase the risk of a delayed reaction.

If you are unwell on the day of your injection, treatment will not be administered as there may be an increased risk of you having a reaction to the treatment. If you are unsure whether to attend you should ring the department as early as possible.

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### Can I have this treatment if I am pregnant?

We will not start immunotherapy if you are already pregnant. However, if you become pregnant whilst you are established on treatment and into the maintenance phase, this could be continued but will need to be discussed with your consultant.

### During the treatment

#### What does the treatment involve?

The treatment will involve injecting a measured amount of the allergen into your arm just underneath the skin.

#### How long will the treatment last?

All treatments are for a 3-year period. For pollen immunotherapy you will require 6 injections per year (usually 3 at weekly intervals, and 3 at 2-weekly intervals). This treatment will be started prior to the pollen season each year.

For venom immunotherapy you will need to follow an up-dosing schedule for a minimum of 15-weekly injections until you reach the maintenance dose. You will then require the maintenance dose for 3-years, at 6-8 weekly intervals.

Subcutaneous immunotherapy clinics are currently run on Tuesday AM/PM, Thursday AM and Friday AM.

### After the treatment

You will be monitored in hospital for at least an hour after each injection. Your injection site will be checked before you go home and post injection advice given.

### Going home

As directed above you should avoid strenuous exercise and hot baths as these activities can increase the risk of a delayed reaction.

### Follow-up

The treatment schedule is outlined above and your next appointment will always be arranged before you leave the hospital.

### Symptoms to report

You should monitor your injection site for local reactions and report these at your next visit. Should you experience a delayed reaction with symptoms that are troublesome you should seek medical attention.

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### What about my other medication?

Your current medication will be reviewed prior to commencement of therapy as there are a number of contra-indicated medications. It is your responsibility to inform either the doctor or nurse if you are commenced on any new medication or diagnosed with a new health condition.

### What commitment is expected from me?

By accepting and starting this treatment you should commit to the three year period, attending for your appointments as scheduled. Your next appointment will be made before you leave clinic to ensure dates are convenient for you. Should you need to change your appointment time this should be done as far in advance as possible to ensure you can be seen within the necessary period.

Please note that missed doses may result in you having to go backwards on the treatment plan or even restart the treatment from the beginning, due to the nature of regular injections throughout the treatment.

### Conditions of acceptance and continuation of treatment

Due to the nature of this treatment and the numbers of patients currently on or waiting to commence treatment, your acceptance of these conditions means you will attend all your appointments and not fail to attend, other than if genuinely unwell or in the event of an emergency.

Patients who regularly fail to attend or make late cancellations will have their treatment discontinued, unless there are good reasons for their non-attendance.

I accept the conditions as listed above:

Signed: ..... (Patient)

..... (Date)

Signed: ..... (Dr/Nurse)

..... (Date)

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### Contact details

Allergy nurses - 0121 507 5695

[Swbh.allergynurses@nhs.net](mailto:Swbh.allergynurses@nhs.net)

Immunology Secretaries – 0121 507 4250

[Swbh.cityimmunology@nhs.net](mailto:Swbh.cityimmunology@nhs.net)

### Further information

More information can be found can be found at:

#### NHS

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

#### Allergy UK

[www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

(Websites accessed 28 April 2023).

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites

[www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook

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