

Lay summary

EAACI GUIDELINES ON ALLERGEN IMMUNOTHERAPY: ALLERGIC RHINOCONJUNCTIVITIS

Allergic rhinoconjunctivitis is the commonest allergy, it is often known as hay fever. Although symptoms are mostly mild, they can be more severe resulting in disturbed sleep, feeling unwell and absenteeism from school or work. This means that the impact on the individual can be immense. From a societal level there is loss of working hours, loss of social activities, costs for medical treatment and consultations and medication. For those with mild symptoms, a pill, nasal spray or eye drops will help their symptoms. They will not help with more severe symptoms. In this situation an allergist may think about "allergy shots", the common name for immunotherapy for allergies. The immune system protects us against substances that may make us ill. Sometimes, the immune system reacts against harmless things such as pollen or cat fur, these are called allergens. The immune system makes antibodies against those allergens. These antibodies cause the symptoms of hayfever. Allergen immunotherapy allows the body to gradually become accustomed to the substance to which we are reacting.

The European Academy for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) is a professional body of allergy specialists and researchers trying to find ways for the best treatment and guidance of allergic people. EAACI has reviewed the evidence for immunotherapy to describe recommendations for the use this therapy.

There are different approaches to immunotherapy. Allergen can be placed under the tongue as drops, dissolve a pill under the tongue or given as a small injections. With some approaches, there is a short period of up-dosing the amount of allergen until the maintenance dose is reached. During the longer maintenance period, daily pills or monthly injections may be needed. Treatment should be given for at least three years. The evidence suggests that immunotherapy drops, pills or injections can relieve the symptoms of hayfever. Not all products work and it is important to choose a treatment where this is evidence that it can control hayfever symptoms.

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