

**Frisco Allergy and Asthma Center (FAAC)  
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**Allergy Shots / Allergen Immunotherapy**

While strict allergen avoidance is the best prevention for allergy symptoms, it is often impossible to avoid the allergens that trigger your allergies. Allergy shots are proven effective therapy for relief of allergy symptoms for most inhalant allergies (pollens, indoor and outdoor molds, dust mites, cockroaches, pets) and stinging insect (bees, wasps, fire ants, etc.). Allergen Immunotherapy is the process where allergy shots gradually induce a state of tolerance in your immune system. Once the patient is less sensitive to these allergens, fewer or less intense symptoms are experienced upon exposure to these allergens. The effectiveness of allergen immunotherapy for lessening symptom severity in patients with allergic rhinitis and asthma has been well documented in research and clinical practice. It is also highly effective for stinging insect allergies. Allergen Immunotherapy is the only long-term solution to minimize allergy symptoms and approach a "cure" for you allergies.

**How Do Allergy Shots Work?**

An allergy occurs when your immune system develops an overactive response to an ordinarily harmless substance that you are exposed to in your environment. Your immune system produces allergic antibodies (IgE) that specifically target these environmental allergens. When these antibodies recognize allergens upon re-exposure, your immune system is further activated to release inflammatory chemicals in your body. This leads to symptoms such as itching, runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, watery / itchy eyes, and in some cases, asthma symptoms such as coughing or wheezing. The most serious reactions can lead to anaphylaxis, a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction involving multiple organ systems.

Once the offending allergens have been identified, an allergist prepares a unique allergy shot serum specific for each patient. The allergy shot serum is comprised of the allergen or allergens that are contributing to your symptoms. By injecting gradually increasing doses of the offending allergens, your immune system becomes more tolerant to these allergens. Then as you become exposed to these allergens in your environment, your now tolerant immune system will no longer be as reactive and will mount much less of an allergic response. By completing a proper duration with recommended strengths of allergy shots, this immunologic tolerance is often maintained long after discontinuing allergy shots.

**Who are the Best Candidates for Allergy Shots?**

If you are unable to avoid the triggers of your allergies or if medications fail to adequately control your symptoms, then allergen immunotherapy may be appropriate. Allergy shots are helpful to treat inhalant allergens and stinging insect venoms but should not be used for food allergies. You may be a candidate for allergy shots if any of the following apply to you:

- If the medications recommended to control your symptoms are not effective.
- If the medications used to control your symptoms produce undesirable side effects.
- If you have asthma triggered by allergies. (It is important to receive allergy shots only when your asthma remains under good control)
- For insect venom allergies, if you are at risk of developing anaphylaxis (a severe reaction that, in some cases, may be fatal)
- If medications control your symptoms, but your symptoms flare back up every time you try to reduce your medications.
- If you cannot effectively avoid the allergens triggering your allergies.
- If you would rather treat the actual problem rather than using medications to mask symptoms.

**Are Allergy Shots Expensive?**

Due to the escalating costs of medications and the often long-term duration needed for medications to help relieve symptoms, allergy shots have been shown to be the most cost-effective way to treat allergies. Allergy shots usually reduce the medications reliance and improve the quality of life in those patients who take them. In addition to feeling better, patients are more apt to need urgent medical visits for complications related to their allergies.

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