

Immunotherapy/Hyposensitisation: An attempt at desensitisation

A long term treatment alternative is to use allergy test information in an attempt at making the patient less sensitive to the offending allergens. Such immunotherapy involves gradually reintroducing the allergens via injection and increasing the dog's resistance to those particular compounds. The biggest advantage is that most treated dogs show improvement and that their need for drug therapy decreases. The main disadvantage is that it sometimes requires a year before improvement is noticed in those animals that will respond.

Will I still need to use other medication?

Symptomatic therapy, preferably with non-steroidal medications or low doses of corticosteroids (on an alternative day basis), may be necessary to keep an animal comfortable while waiting for the injection to take affect. Even with successful immunotherapy some drug therapy may be needed.

Are these safe?

Painless subcutaneous injections of allergen extracts, or "allergy shots" as they are most commonly known, are given in gradually increasing doses to minimize the possibility of allergic reactions. Adverse reactions to these shots are rare in dogs, but to be on the safe side, the patient should be closely monitored for 1-3 hours after each injection.

How long before I see an improvement?

It is not unusual for eight to twelve months of therapy to pass before the benefits of immunotherapy are realized in those animals capable of responding. The success rate of immunotherapy depends on many variables, but the most important are proper selection of allergens and the criteria used to define success.

How often are the "allergy shots" successful?

In very rough terms, about 25% of the animals will have excellent results and 25% will have poor results. Therefore, if an examiner classifies animals that show at least some benefits as success, 75% is a realistic success rate. Those examiners that count only those with good or excellent responses will claim a 50% success rate. Of course, concurrent disorders such as pyoderma, pyotraumatic dermatitis, otitis externa and external parasites must also be treated.

How long do I have to give the "allergy shots" for?

How long the "allergy shots" need to be given differs from animal to animal. In people allergy shots are given from between two to seven years before they are able to be discontinued. The time frame is similar in animals.