

Department of Allergy

Information for Patients Undergoing Venom Desensitisation

Desensitisation (or immunotherapy) is a highly effective treatment for severe bee and wasp sting allergy. Desensitisation is only considered for severe reactions and if you remain at high risk of being stung in the future. The effect of the treatment is to substantially reduce your allergic reaction to further stings, by giving small amounts of the allergen (a substance that causes an allergy) at safe intervals.

Procedure

Desensitisation involves regular injections under the skin of your arm. Increasing amounts of bee or wasp venom are given weekly for 11 weeks or until the top dose is achieved. This is followed by monthly injections at the top dose for three months and followed by an injection at the same dose every three months for three years.

Before each injection, you will have your pulse, blood pressure and peak respiratory flow measured by the nurse. The doctor will then ask you questions about your general health and whether you developed an allergic reaction with any previous injections. The injection is given in the outer aspect of the upper arm by the doctor or nurse, you may experience some discomfort at the site of the injection. After you have been injected it is necessary to remain in the Clinic under observation for one hour. During this time you will have further measurements of your pulse, blood pressure and peak respiratory flow. At intervals during the 3-year desensitisation you will be asked to have a blood test to monitor the specific antibodies to venom.

Side Effects

The injection site may become slightly swollen and itchy for up to 2-3 days but these reactions generally improve once the top dose is reached. Some patients develop tiredness for up to 24 hours after the injection especially during the first three months. Less commonly, reactions that are more serious can occur such as a generalised itchy rash, asthma, itchy eyes or nasal symptoms. All these are readily treatable.

Severe Allergic Reactions

Occasionally a severe allergic reaction can occur soon after the injection and will be treated quickly by the clinic doctor. These severe reactions are the reason why it is necessary to have this form of treatment in a specialised Allergy Clinic run by staff that are highly trained in the treatment of allergy.

Effectiveness of Desensitisation

Bee and wasp venom desensitisation is highly effective (85-95%) and the majority of patients will benefit. However, long-term improvement is only seen if you continue with at least three years treatment.

Other Medications

It is very important that you tell the doctor which medications you are taking or if you start a new drug during the desensitisation period. Most drugs can be continued during desensitisation but beta-blockers, which are often prescribed for blood pressure, or heart conditions must be stopped before treatment is started.

Precautions after an Injection

Exercise can increase absorption of allergen from the injection site and can lead to increased risk of side effects. We would therefore recommend that vigorous exercise such as cycling home or taking part in any activity that involves strenuous use of your arms should not be undertaken for 24 hours after the injection.

If you are Unwell

If you are unwell with a cold, flu or have a fever for any other reason your injection will have to be postponed until you recover. Please contact the clinic on 01223 256224 or 01223 216645. Similarly, if you have other allergic symptoms, which have become worse recently, for example hay fever or asthma, the injection dose may be either reduced or delayed.

Pregnancy

Desensitisation is not usually started or continued during pregnancy because of the risk to the baby should a severe reaction occur.

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Potete chiedere di ottenere queste informazioni in altre lingue, in stampato grande o in audiocassetta.

Italian

若你需要本信息的繁體中文、大字體或音訊格式的版本，請要求索取。

Cantonese

तमने आ माळिती वीछ भाषाओमां, मोटा अक्षरोमां अथवा सांभली शकाय जेवा माध्यम (ओडीओ डोमेन्ट)मां जेठती छोय तो कृपा करीने पूछो.

Gujarati

تکایه پرسیار بکه نه گهر نه وزانیاریهت دهوی به زمانیکی تر ، به پیتی گهوره یانیش به شیوهی دهنگ

Kurdish

آگر آپ کو یہ معلومات دوسری زبانوں میں، بڑے الفاظ کی اشاعت میں یا آڈیو ٹیپ پروکاروں تو برائے مہربانی اس کیلئے درخواست کریں۔

Urdu



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Document history

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| Contact number | 01223 217777 or 01223 586977 |
| Published | August 2005 |
| Reviewed and reissued | July 2007, no changes made |
| Review date | July 2009 |
| File name | DesensInfo1.doc |
| Version number | 2 |
| Ref | PIN 285 |