

**EXPERT CARE AND
IMMUNOTHERAPY FOR
ASTHMA**

A Guide for People with Asthma

Expert Care and Immunotherapy for Asthma

In scientific circles, the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology is considered to be the world authority on the treatment of asthma. In November of 1996, a special Ad Hoc committee consisting of five world-renowned experts published the results of the most extensive study on the treatment of asthma ever completed. The conclusions of this study, while not surprising, are truly remarkable. The study clearly showed that the most important therapeutic modalities for treatment of asthma are avoidance and immunotherapy.

Avoidance of irritants and allergens, identified by allergy skin testing, is the mainstay of therapy for allergic asthma. Immunotherapy, commonly known as allergy injections, refers to the periodic injection of extracts of allergens which the patient cannot completely avoid. Allergen identification, allergen avoidance, and allergen immunotherapy reduces symptoms of asthma, improves pulmonary functioning, and achieves less dependence on health care resources, including medications. This will, of course, lead to progressive cost savings.

The study found that if all asthmatics are treated in this manner, by properly trained allergists, hospitalization for asthma would be reduced by 77% and emergency room visits would be reduced by 53%. This would mean an annual savings of 1.3 billion dollars for hospital and emergency room visits alone. Hospitals are dangerous places for asthmatics. Expert care by properly trained

allergists keeps asthmatics well and out of the hospital, and death from asthma should be rare.

Also, the study clearly shows that allergy immunotherapy reduces the degree of allergy and thereby, reduces the severity of asthma and lessens or eliminates the need for the relentless use of expensive medications. The best measure of the expertise of an allergist is the amount of medicines he must use to control asthma. The best allergist uses the fewest medicines and thus avoids their dangerous side effects. In summary, the study concluded that:

1 Assessment and management of asthma by properly trained allergists not only is very effective, but also is very cost effective.

2 Family Practitioners, Pediatricians, Internists, and other generalists as a group do not have the time, knowledge, or in some cases, the equipment necessary to properly treat most asthmatics.

3 Assessment and management of the allergic component (allergy skin testing, allergen avoidance and allergen immunotherapy) are essential parts of proper care. Allergen avoidance and immunotherapy are not only clinically very effective, but are also very cost effective.

4 Careful individualized care by properly trained allergists leads to greatly improved outcomes for asthma.

In a previous study by the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, other important conclusions were drawn. Proper treatment together with Immunotherapy (allergy injections) by a well trained allergist, resulted in approximately 50% less time lost from work and school. The study also found that asthmatic patients who received this type of treatment, from properly trained allergists, experienced improved activity levels, better emotional functioning, and increased worker productivity. In addition, they become more satisfied with their physician and their medical care in general.

In 1998 the World Health Organization, recognized as the world authority on health care issues, published a position paper on allergy immunotherapy: Therapeutic Vaccines for Allergic Disease. The position paper is a first ever international guideline for the administration of allergy injections. The position paper discussed the proper treatment of allergic disease including asthma. It emphasized that drugs treat only symptoms, whereas allergen avoidance and immunotherapy (allergy injections) are the only therapeutic modalities which modify the natural course of the disease.

In asthma, allergens cause inflammation of the bronchial tubes which can cause irreversible lung damage. Because immunotherapy blocks this inflammation, it actually prevents this irreversible lung damage. The major objectives of immunotherapy are in the short term, to reduce responses to allergic triggers which precipitate symptoms and eventually to

decrease the inflammatory response, and to prevent the development of irreversible lung damage.

The advantage of initiating immunotherapy in children, is that when introduced at the onset or during the early phase of the disease it may modify the natural course of the disease and prevent lung damage. Also, when immunotherapy is administered to children who have only hayfever, it prevents the development of asthma.

The position paper also points out that immunotherapy alters the natural course of allergy progression by preventing sensitization to new allergens. Finally, the W.H.O. reviewed the entire existing body of scientific literature on the effectiveness of immunotherapy in the treatment of asthma. It was found, without a doubt, that immunotherapy is highly effective and clearly superior to treatment with drug therapy alone.

If you have any questions on expert care and immunotherapy for asthma, feel free to contact us at:

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Information for "Expert Care and Immunotherapy for Asthma" was obtained from the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology and the World Health Organization.

This brochure was published through a grant from Novartis Corporation.

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