Allergen Immunotherapy (SCIT) Patient Guide

A simple guide to allergy shots

Subcutaneous allergen immunotherapy (SCIT)—commonly called **allergy shots**—is a long-term treatment for selected patients with allergic disease.

Instead of only controlling allergy symptoms, SCIT gradually exposes the immune system to carefully controlled amounts of a relevant allergen. Over time, this can reduce the body's allergic response and improve symptoms in appropriately selected patients.

SCIT is commonly used for conditions such as **allergic rhinitis/rhinoconjunctivitis and selected allergic asthma**, when there is clear evidence that the allergen is clinically relevant.

Who May Benefit From SCIT?

Your allergist may consider SCIT when:

• Your symptoms are caused by a **clinically relevant IgE-mediated allergy**

• Avoidance measures and medicines do not provide adequate control

• Allergy medicines cause troublesome side effects

• You would prefer a treatment aimed at providing longer-term benefit

• The relevant allergen has an appropriate evidence-based immunotherapy option

A positive allergy test alone is **not enough** to decide whether SCIT is appropriate. Your allergy history, symptoms, exposure and test results are considered together.

How Does SCIT Work?

SCIT is usually given in two stages:

1. Build-up phase

The allergen dose is gradually increased according to the prescribed schedule.

This allows your immune system to become accustomed to the allergen while maintaining safety.

2. Maintenance phase

Once the appropriate maintenance dose is reached, injections are given at longer intervals according to your individualized treatment schedule.

SCIT is a **long-term treatment**. For patients who respond well, treatment is commonly continued for **at least 3 years**, although the duration is individualized according to clinical response, allergen and treatment plan.

Before Every Allergy Injection

Please tell your allergy team if:

• You are unwell or have a fever

• Your asthma symptoms have worsened

• You have had wheezing, chest tightness or increased use of your reliever inhaler

• You experienced any reaction after your previous injection

• You have started or stopped an important medication

• You are pregnant or planning pregnancy

• You have developed a new medical condition

Asthma is particularly important

SCIT should not be given when asthma is poorly controlled.

If you have asthma, your doctor may assess your current symptoms and lung function before proceeding with an injection.

Never stop your regular asthma controller medicines because you have started immunotherapy.

On the Day of Your Injection

Eat normally

You generally do not need to fast before SCIT. Having your usual meal and maintaining normal hydration is reasonable unless your doctor has given you different instructions.

Tell us how you are feeling

Please do not hide symptoms because you do not want to miss an injection.

Your safety is more important than keeping the schedule.

If you are unwell or your asthma is not well controlled, your allergist may decide to postpone or modify the dose.

Take your prescribed medicines as directed

Do not change your regular medicines unless your doctor tells you to.

After Your Injection

You will be asked to remain in the clinic for an appropriate observation period after your injection.

This is important because although most reactions are mild, **systemic allergic reactions can occasionally occur after SCIT**.

During observation, tell the clinic staff immediately if you develop:

• Increasing itching

• Hives

• Swelling

• Sneezing or nasal symptoms

• Cough

• Wheezing

• Chest tightness

• Difficulty breathing

• Throat tightness

• Dizziness or faintness

• Any rapidly developing or unusual symptoms

SCIT should be administered in a clinical setting with personnel and equipment capable of recognizing and treating systemic allergic reactions.

What Reactions Can Occur?

Local reactions

It is relatively common to develop:

• Redness

• Itching

• Mild pain

• Swelling around the injection site

These reactions are usually temporary.

Systemic reactions

Less commonly, symptoms can involve areas away from the injection site, including:

• Generalized hives

• Swelling

• Nasal or eye symptoms

• Cough or wheezing

• Breathing difficulty

• Gastrointestinal symptoms

• Dizziness or low blood pressure

Severe systemic reactions, including **anaphylaxis**, are uncommon but potentially serious. This is why every SCIT injection must be administered according to an appropriate safety protocol.

What If I Miss an Injection?

Do not simply take the next dose yourself or double the dose.

If you miss an appointment or have a longer-than-planned gap between injections, contact your allergy clinic.

Depending on the length of the gap and your treatment stage, your allergist may need to **adjust or reduce the dose before continuing**.

What If I Am Sick?

Please contact the clinic before your injection if you have:

- Fever or significant infection
- Acute breathing problems
- An asthma flare
- Significant worsening of allergy symptoms
- Another condition that makes you feel unwell

Your allergist will decide whether it is safe to administer the injection that day.

When Should I Seek Emergency Help?

After leaving the clinic, seek **urgent medical attention** if you develop symptoms suggesting a serious allergic reaction, particularly:

- Difficulty breathing or severe wheezing
- Throat or tongue swelling
- Difficulty swallowing or speaking
- Severe dizziness or fainting
- Rapidly worsening symptoms
- Widespread hives accompanied by breathing or circulation symptoms

If your allergy specialist has provided you with an **epinephrine/adrenaline action plan**, follow it immediately.

How Long Before I Notice Improvement?

SCIT is not an instant treatment.

Some patients notice improvement during the build-up or maintenance period, while others require longer treatment before seeing substantial benefit.

The response varies between individuals and depends on factors such as:

- The allergen being treated
- The underlying allergic condition
- Treatment adherence
- Duration of treatment
- Individual response

For patients who respond, appropriately delivered SCIT can reduce allergy symptoms and medication requirements, with benefits that may persist after an adequate course of treatment.

The Most Important Things to Remember

SCIT works gradually. Consistency matters. Safety comes first.

■ Attend your injections according to your prescribed schedule

■ Tell us if you are unwell before an injection

■ Tell us about any reaction after a previous injection

■ Tell us if your asthma is worsening

■ Do not change your dose yourself

■ Do not double a dose after a missed appointment

■ Remain in the clinic for the required observation period

■ Follow your allergy team's instructions throughout treatment

A Final Word From Your Allergy Team

Allergy shots are a **long-term partnership between you and your allergy team**.

The aim is not simply to give repeated injections. It is to identify the allergens that are genuinely relevant to your disease, use an appropriate treatment schedule, monitor your response and keep you safe throughout the process.

If something doesn't feel right, **tell us**. Whether you have missed an appointment, developed asthma symptoms, experienced a reaction or are unsure about your next dose, contact your allergy clinic rather than making changes yourself.

Medical Disclaimer

This guide is intended for **general patient education** and does not replace individualized medical advice from a qualified allergy specialist.

Subcutaneous allergen immunotherapy is a prescription medical treatment and is **not suitable for everyone**. Patient selection, allergen selection, dosing schedules, dose adjustments, treatment duration and monitoring must be individualized according to the patient's diagnosis, medical history, asthma control, medications and the specific allergen immunotherapy preparation and protocol being used.

SCIT can cause systemic allergic reactions, including **anaphylaxis**, although serious reactions are uncommon. It should be administered by appropriately trained healthcare professionals in a setting equipped to recognize and manage systemic allergic reactions.

Do not start, stop, increase, decrease, or restart SCIT doses without instructions from your treating allergy specialist.

This guide reflects current international principles and recommendations from the **AAAAI/ACAAI Joint Task Force on Practice Parameters, EAACI and other international allergy guidance**. Recommendations and licensed allergen products can differ between countries and may be updated as new evidence becomes available.

Key References

1. **AAAAI/ACAAI Joint Task Force on Practice Parameters. Allergen Immunotherapy Practice Parameter Update, 2026.**

2. **EAACI Guidelines on Allergen Immunotherapy: Allergic Rhinoconjunctivitis.**

3. **EAACI guidance on allergen immunotherapy safety and adverse reactions.**

4. **EAACI/International guidance on allergen immunotherapy in allergic asthma.**