

Sublingual Immunotherapy:

alternative treatment treatment for allergies and asthma:

Interview with Dr Darin Ingels

People who suffer from allergies and asthma now have a viable alternative to conventional injection immunotherapy in treating their symptoms. Although injection immunotherapy has been the gold standard for allergy desensitization for almost 100 years, over 300 published studies shows that sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) is equally or more effective than allergy shots in reducing allergy and asthma symptoms. The allergy extracts used in SLIT are identical to those used in injection immunotherapy, but rather than receiving a shot on a weekly or monthly basis, oral drops are administered under the tongue, often on a daily basis.

Recent research shows that during SLIT, the allergen is absorbed into the oral mucosa. Although SLIT seems relatively new in the United States, it has been used clinically for more than three decades. Its use has increased steadily in the past 15 years, but mostly in other countries, especially those in Europe. Some critics of SLIT have argued that there is a lack of research documenting its efficacy. However, two recent meta-analyses showed that SLIT significantly reduced symptoms of allergic rhinitis and asthma, as well as decreased use of rescue medication. Studies show SLIT effectively treats allergies to pollen, mold, dust mites, animal dander, foods and latex. A three-year study found SLIT plus allergy medication led to significant reductions in allergy symptom scores and airway hyperreactivity by 73% and 61%, respectively, while no improvement was observed in the group taking allergy medications only. Other shorter studies suggest SLIT can start to reduce allergy symptoms and asthma within weeks to months. Dr. Darin J. Ingels answers a few question about sublingual immunotherapy, allergies and sensitivities.

Which is more common, food allergies or environmental allergies?

The term "allergy" is used in a strict definition in the US, so I'd say that food allergies are fairly uncommon (referring to anaphylactic or life threatening allergies), but food sensitivities and intolerances are quite common. However, environmental allergies to mold, pollen, dust and animal danders are continuing to rise each year. I comparison, I would say food sensitivities are more prevalent than environmental allergies.

Why is SLIT an important part of anyone's autism recovery plan?

SLIT refers to the administration of drops under the tongue to help desensitize the immune system to whatever allergen provokes the immune system in a negative way. It is an important part of an ASD child's treatment plan because it is one of the few ways we can reduce the load on the body and help change immune function. Since almost all ASD kids have some degree of immune dysfunction, SLIT allows us to change the way the immune system responds to things that are a normal part of a child's world.

Can you give us an overview of how the SLIT program works?

When the child comes into my office, an assessment is done to determine which allergens are affecting that particular child. Based on these findings, drops can be made up that are very specific to what the child is sensitive or allergic to. Over the course of treatment, increasing amounts of the allergen are administered to help desensitize the child to a particular allergen. In time, the immune system can be completely desensitized to a specific allergen so that the child is no longer affected when exposed to the allergen.

In addition to autism recovery, what childhood or adult conditions does SLIT typically help?

SLIT is useful in the treatment of seasonal allergies, asthma, eczema, intestinal problems, recurrent infections, behavior problems and sleep disturbances to name a few.

What is the difference between SLIT, NAET, and BioSET?

SLIT is the administration of specific allergens under the tongue to help desensitize the immune system to that allergen. NAET is a technique that combines applied kinesiology (muscle testing) with acupressure and acupuncture to try to achieve the same goal. BioSET is another non-invasive technique to help block allergic reactions using electromagnetic energy. Neither NAET or BioSET involve administering actual allergen to the person. The goal is the same with all three techniques, but are very different approaches.

Why doesn't traditional allergy testing work?

Conventional allergy testing (skin prick or RAST testing) only looks at a very specific immune response involving a molecule called IgE, which is an antibody associated with anaphylactic reactions. For children who get hives, wheezing, swelling or life threatening reactions, these tests can be very useful in determining what substance provoked the reaction. However, most immune reactions do not involve IgE and involve other immune mechanisms. Therefore, the conventional tests miss these reactions and false negatives are quite common. This is especially true for food reactions that rarely involve IgE.

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Most people think about spring allergies and they think red eyes, runny noses and sneezing...that is not always the case for ASD kids. Why do seasonal allergies have a behavioral effect on our ASD kids?

Kids with ASD have more mast cells in their brains, which are the cells responsible for producing histamine and other chemicals that trigger allergic reactions, so when they have allergies, we see neurological effects, such as behavior changes, mood changes, sleep problems, cognitive difficulties and language problems.

When treating allergies, do you see a difference in how kids with autism respond as opposed to kids without autism in how they respond?

Kids with autism are generally more sensitive than my non-ASD kids, so the response tends to be more dramatic in ASD children.

Are most of the children you treat on the autism spectrum?

About 70% of my practice involves children on the spectrum. However, I do work with many children without ASD who have asthma, allergies, gastrointestinal problems and eczema.

Why do our ASD kids look so terrible in the high pollen/mold seasons? (ie, dark circles under eyes, sunken eyes, pale skin)

These are physical signs of allergic reactions. As mold and pollen counts rise in the air, these kids become more reactive and we see the physical manifestations.

What could swollen, itchy red feet and hands in the spring time mean?

In the spring, tree pollen and mold start to rise nationwide, so either irritant could trigger these reactions.

What type of allergies are the most common with asd kids?

Food, mold, dust and pollen are all very common.

How long does it typically take to see a difference?

Improvement in symptoms can often be seen within one month of treatment. However, it can take several months to years to get the immune system healthy enough that SLIT is no longer necessary.

What is the percentage of children that have become allergy-free from using SLIT therapy?

In my practice, somewhere around 90+% of kids have become allergy free after using SLIT treatment for foods and 70-75% for environmental allergies.