

Sublingual immunotherapy

What is sublingual immunotherapy for aeroallergens?

Also known as desensitization, sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) is the process of administering tablets of an environmental substance that a person is allergic to (aeroallergen). The person's own immunity is engaged to help control or reduce the allergic reaction. An extract of the environmental allergen is given in tablets under the tongue and allowed to absorb. This is given daily over a period of 3 years.

While SLIT may not always completely cure an allergy, it can significantly reduce symptoms in most patients for up to 20 years.

Generally, it takes at least 6-12 months, sometimes longer, to see an improvement once the desensitization process has started.

Why have SLIT?

SLIT is often the recommended treatment for allergic rhinitis (hay fever) due to a pollen or dust mite allergy (and sometimes asthma) when:

- Symptoms are severe.
- The cause is difficult to avoid (such as grass pollen).
- Asthma is triggered by aeroallergens.
- Medications do not help relieve symptoms or cause adverse side effects.
- People prefer to avoid medications.

While undergoing SLIT, your child can still use allergy medications and must continue asthma medications as usual.

Your child's first dose of tablets will be given at the hospital by a clinical nurse consultant or clinical nurse or at your local GP. The tablets are then administered daily at home.

On the day of your child's SLIT

Your child should be feeling well. If your child has asthma, they may have to undergo a pulmonary function test (PFT) prior to their first appointment.

If your child has symptoms on the day of their appointment, they can take a non-drowsy antihistamine about 30 minutes to one hour before having their tablet to reduce itchiness that may occur at the site.

Common methods for taking the allergen extracts:

- Take in the morning on an empty stomach



- Keep the tablet under the tongue for at least 2 minutes, then swallow.
- **Do NOT eat/drink anything for 5 minutes.**
- Avoid crunchy cereals as these may cut the tongue and increase the likelihood of mouth irritation from the extracts.
- If you forget to take them in the morning, continue treatment the next morning at the usual dosage.

You will receive a patient handbook on the day of your first appointment and be given instructions regarding the dosing at home. The dose of medication will increase daily for 2 days (initiation phase) until a regular dose is achieved (maintenance phase).

Please refer to booklet for further information.

Do not give the tablets if your child has a fever, are unwell or have unstable asthma.

Local and adverse reactions to SLIT

Many patients undergo SLIT with no problems but allergic reactions to the tablets can sometimes occur. Mild or moderate reactions include itching, swelling, or burning feeling of the lips/mouth, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. These are mainly observed during the initiation phase. These symptoms can be treated with an antihistamine and the SLIT should be continued on the same dose the following day.

If it continues to occur, contact the Immunology Department for further advice.

In the event of a severe reaction such as anaphylaxis (coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing, collapse), please treat accordingly as per anaphylaxis action plan or call 000. **DO NOT CONTINUE with SLIT at home.** Please contact the Immunology Department.

Your child's appointments

You will be contacted by an allergy clinical nurse and an appointment will be arranged for your child to start treatment either at Perth Children's Hospital (PCH) or at your local GP.

You will be required to go to the PCH Pharmacy, Level 1, to collect the allergen immunotherapy medication prior to the appointment.

Your child will be followed up with a 12-month call after commencing immunotherapy. You will be able to contact the allergy clinical nurse consultant if you have any concerns regarding the treatment.

Three years after commencing immunotherapy you will be contacted by an allergy clinical nurse to confirm the completion of treatment and determine if further follow up is required by an immunologist.

Ordering and storage of allergens

- Your first script will come with the initiation tablets as well as maintenance with 5 repeats.
- Further scripts can be ordered via phone or email:
paediatric.immunology@health.wa.gov.au
- Please ensure to state your child's name, date of birth and the type of aeroallergen script required.
- Please allow 7-10 business days for ordering of scripts.
- Medications must be stored below 30 degrees.

Contact Details

- PCH Immunology Department: 6456 4360 (general enquires, change of appointments).
- Allergy clinical nurse consultant: 6456 4367 (clinical enquiries Monday to Friday 8am-4pm).
- Email: paediatric.immunology@health.wa.gov.au for allergen immunotherapy scripts.



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Child and Adolescent Health Service



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Produced by: Immunology Department
Ref: 1152 © CAHS 2018 Revised 2025

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