



The Best Allergy Fix

If the very thought of spring makes you sneeze, here's good news: Research shows just how much immunotherapy—aka allergy shots—can help your health and wallet. An 11-year study of more than 13,000 Florida children found that the shots slashed health costs by a third and prescription costs by 16 percent. Kids getting the shots began to feel better as early as three months into treatment. “This

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reaffirms what we've seen in practice—fewer office visits and less need for medicine,” says researcher Linda Cox, MD. “The treatment actually changes the body's allergic response instead of just masking symptoms.”

Immunotherapy is worth considering for anyone who doesn't get enough relief from medications or who just hates paying for them, Dr. Cox says. Another selling point: Unlike other remedies, immunotherapy reduces the risk of allergies morphing into asthma.

Of course, no one likes shots—and immunotherapy typically requires 20 to 30 in the first six months. But new developments could soon make needles unnecessary. Several companies are developing sublingual tablets—pills that deliver tiny doses of allergens under the tongue. A 2008 study from London's Imperial College found the tablets to be as effective as shots. Now widely used in Europe, sublingual immunotherapy may get FDA approval within a couple of years, Dr. Cox says. Also in the pipeline: a new treatment that requires just four shots in six weeks.

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