

Cutting-Edge Treatments Target Allergies



Expert Advice From:

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Miller Children's & Women's Teams Use Immunotherapy to Resolve Conditions

Babies and children suffering with life-threatening allergies may benefit from immunotherapy, a cutting-edge treatment offered by the world-renowned pediatric teams at the Children's Pulmonary Institute, MemorialCare Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach.

Led by internationally recognized board-certified pulmonologist and immunologist Inderpal Randhawa, M.D., the Miller Children's & Women's highly trained, multi-disciplinary teams of physicians, therapists, nurses, pharmacists, social workers and other specialists employ immunotherapy and other revolutionary therapies in successfully treating young patients with seasonal, environmental, skin, and food allergies.

Allergies are diagnosed through blood and skin tests. Traditional treatments, in addition to over-the-counter medications, include allergy shots and prescription medications.

"Often people hear someone's suffering with allergies, and they think of it as something that's easily treatable with over-the-counter medication, but the reality is that allergies can be much more serious," Dr. Randhawa explains. "The world of allergies is significant because it impacts millions of children's lives; targeting and treating allergies successfully, ultimately can increase kids' life expectancies.

"This is a giant area of medicine and I still think it doesn't get the attention it deserves."

Immunotherapy involves giving gradually increasing doses of the substance, or allergen, to which the person is allergic. Incremental increases of the allergen cause the immune system to become less sensitive to the substance, probably by causing production of a 'blocking' antibody, which reduces the symptoms of allergy when the substance is encountered in the future. Immunotherapy also reduces the inflammation that characterizes rhinitis and asthma.

"The concept of immunotherapy has been around for more than 100 years," Dr. Randhawa notes. "The oldest model of this type of treatment is the vaccine, which utilizes an individual's own immune system to ensure they don't become ill or as ill as others who are unvaccinated."

"In the world of seasonal allergies, this treatment has been around and gotten much better in the last 20 years with better approaches and solutions." An example he cites is

- gradually exposing a child who is allergic to cat and dog dander to the substances until they are able to tolerate exposure without an allergic response.

- At Miller Children's & Women's, immunotherapy specialists use injections and oral sprays that contain biologic agents to expose their young patients gradually, over periods ranging from two to eight weeks.

- "Unfortunately, patients are referred to us when all over-the-counter remedies have failed," Dr. Randhawa says. "The solution is to target the source of their problem and convince their immune system not to respond to allergens so that they can eliminate their need for medication."

- Under FDA and academic guidelines, immunotherapeutic treatment is targeted to produce the best responses and best long-term effects, he says. "If you're allergic to five different grasses, we don't have to expose you to all five, but we can pick the one that will be the most effective.

- The Children's Pulmonary Institute Miller Children's & Women's has the capability to run standardized allergy testing, as well as an array of sophisticated diagnostic laboratory tests that provide its physicians with more detailed information that isn't generally available at other medical facilities, Dr. Randhawa notes. Parents of children with allergies should consider Miller Children's & Women's for a multitude of reasons, he says. Not only are its specially trained physicians and teams world-class, but its health centers are state-of-the-art and it offers an array trailblazing therapies, like immunotherapy treatments.

- "It's very fulfilling to treat patients with serious medical conditions using immunotherapy and newer biological agents that provide them with the best resolutions," he says.

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