

Drug Desensitization

What is desensitization?

Being allergic to a drug means your body reacts in an unsafe way to that drug. Sometimes you may need this medicine for your treatment. If there are no other medicines you can take, desensitization may be tried. Desensitization is a process in which you are given tiny doses of the medicine very slowly so your body does not react to that medicine. **This effect is only temporary.** If you stop taking the medicine you would need to be desensitized again.

Common medicine allergies treated include:

- Aspirin.
- Antibiotics.
- Chemotherapy medicines.

What do I need to do before the procedure?

- **You will need to sign a consent form for the desensitization procedure. The consent also gives us permission to treat any reactions.**
- You will be given special instructions about some medicines that need to be stopped or started before the procedure.

What happens during the procedure?

- The medicine is given in very small amounts by mouth or through a vein. The amount will slowly increase over time. This means it will take many hours to get the full dose.
- Most often, you will need to stay overnight in the intensive care unit (ICU) to be watched and to get your next dose.
- If you have a reaction, it will be treated with other medicines. The procedure will keep going if it is safe. Any life-threatening reaction will stop the procedure.

Are there any risks?

You will be getting a medicine that you are allergic to. Because of this, there is a risk for reactions. Some of these may result in the need for life saving medicines such as epinephrine. In rare cases, desensitization can cause a severe reaction that leads to death. For these reasons all patients are closely watched in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

The risks are higher when:

- Medicine is given through a vein.
- You are very young
- You are elderly.
- You have a history of heart disease.

What are the possible reactions?

Serious Reactions: These are very serious and can lead to death if they are not treated. Tell the nurse **right away** if you have any of the following:

- **Hives.** Rash, swelling or itching of more than one part of your body
- **Swelling.** Any part of your body, inside or out. This includes the mouth, tongue and throat. It can be one or many parts of your body.
- **Breathing problems.** Shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing or chest tightness.
- **Other.** Repeated sneezing, dizziness, sick stomach or just not “feeling right”

Anaphylactic shock. This is the most serious allergic reaction and the above symptoms can lead to this. It can happen any time after the medicine is taken.

- If there is a serious or anaphylactic reaction, emergency medicine will be given right away.

What happens after the procedure?

It is important that you do not **do not miss even one dose** of this medicine. Take it as prescribed. If you miss a dose of your medicine, the reaction will come back and it could be severe.

If you need this medicine again, or if you miss any doses, you will have to do the desensitization procedure again.

ALERT: Call the doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if:

- A reaction happens after going home from the ICU.
- A dose of the medicine is missed.
- There are special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for yourself or your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.