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Treating Allergies: No Shots, Try Drops

by *Dennis Douda*

(WCCO) More than 50 million Americans suffer from allergies. For decades people from the Twin Cities have been driving to a clinic in Wisconsin where many say they are finding a cure.

Tami Simonson, of Lake Crystal, Minn. said she has always battled allergies.

"You know, you carry a box of Kleenex no matter where you go and most of the prescription medications, no matter what I tried, made me sleepy all day," said Simonson.

She said her allergies include molds, dust mites, animal hairs, from horses, cats, and dogs, and a little bit of ragweed. She considered allergy shots, until she learned it meant repeated visits to a clinic for up to a year.

Shots do make sense. Doctors gradually desensitize the body by injecting small amounts of allergens, the things that trigger allergic reactions. The process is called immunotherapy.

However, U.S. and international studies show 95 percent of allergy patients only treat their symptoms. That means fewer than 5 percent of sufferers have tried immunotherapy to actually treat their condition. Maybe if they knew they could trade a syringe for a liquid dropper that number would change.

Simonson gives herself daily drops under the tongue. It is called Sublingual Immunotherapy. Simonson said since she started taking the drops last September she has completely quit taking any prescription medications.

"This was the first spring that allergies haven't led me to a sinus infection," she said.

The clinic she visits is Allergy Associates in La Crosse, Wis. Each patient's allergy drops are custom mixed specifically for their needs. Environmental trouble-makers, plants pollens, pets, molds and so forth are blended in one vial. In another vial, technicians combine traces of the various foods people are allergic to.

"As the person's tolerance is gained we make the concentration in the drops stronger until we get to the point they no longer react to the items they're allergic to and then they're finished," said Dr. Mary Morris.

Morris said Allergy Associates has been refining their technique for more than 30 years and tracking the results.

According to their studies, patients reported a 76 percent drop in missed work or school and a 60 percent fewer doctor visits after sublingual therapy. Patients general start report improvement after six to eight weeks of the drops.

The clinic is also conducting asthma studies on kids. They've found most don't need inhalers or asthma medications after being treated with drops. Their research shows the effects last beyond 5 years.



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Tami Simonson gives herself daily drops under the tongue. It is called Sublingual Immunotherapy. CBS

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