



HELPING WEST MICHIGAN BREATHE EASIER FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS

BY: SARAH MARILYN

Allergies can affect much more than a single season. From persistent congestion and itchy eyes to asthma, eczema, food allergies and chronic hives, allergic conditions can impact sleep, school, work and the activities patients enjoy most.

For more than 50 years, Grand Rapids Allergy has helped children and adults across West Michigan understand what is causing their symptoms and find an individualized path forward.

Founded in 1972, the practice has grown from a single-physician office into a women-led team of board-certified physicians, nurse practitioners and specialty-trained nurses. Today, that team continues to build on decades of experience while embracing new approaches to allergy care and treatment.

BEST PRACTICES >



LISTENING COMES FIRST

No two patients experience allergies in exactly the same way. Seasonal pollen may be the culprit for one patient, while another may be affected by pet dander, certain foods, insect stings or medications. Even when symptoms appear similar, the triggers and the impact on daily life can be very different. That individuality is why care at Grand Rapids Allergy begins with listening. Each patient's story helps guide the evaluation and, when appropriate, testing such as skin, blood or patch testing can help uncover what's behind an allergic response. For Christine Schafer, M.D., listening has been central to more than three decades of caring for patients. Double board-certified in Allergy/Immunology and Pediatrics, Dr. Schafer spent 17 years in active-duty military medicine, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force, before joining Grand Rapids Allergy in 2001.

"Listening is one of the most important things we do," Dr. Schafer said. "Two patients can walk through the door with similar symptoms but have very different triggers and needs. Understanding the whole person helps us determine the right approach for that individual."

TREATING THE CAUSE, NOT JUST THE SYMPTOMS

Managing allergies doesn't always mean simply managing symptoms. While avoiding known allergens or using medication may provide enough relief for some patients, others may benefit from treatment designed to change how the immune system responds to specific triggers.

Grand Rapids Allergy offers a range of treatment options tailored to each patient, including traditional allergy injections, sublingual immunotherapy, medications, avoidance strategies, biologic medications and accelerated immunotherapy. Immunotherapy works by gradually desensitizing the immune system to specific allergens. Advances in allergy care are also giving patients more options for how treatment fits into their lives and Grand Rapids Allergy is bringing one of those newer approaches to Michigan.



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EDUCATION IS PART OF THE TREATMENT

Understanding why symptoms happen can be just as important as knowing how to treat them. At Grand Rapids Allergy, education helps patients better understand their triggers, medications and treatment options.

For Sara Uekert, M.D., a Grand Rapids native and board-certified allergist/immunologist and pediatrician, that commitment extends into the community through asthma screenings, school allergy preparedness and medical education.

"Education gives patients and families another tool for managing allergic disease," Dr. Uekert said. "When people understand their triggers and treatment options, they can feel more confident managing their health."

INNOVATION > THREE TREATMENTS. LONG-TERM RELIEF

Grand Rapids Allergy is the first practice in Michigan to offer QUICK-LI, an intralymphatic immunotherapy (ILIT) treatment designed to provide long-term relief from environmental allergies in just three treatments.

Unlike traditional allergy shots, which typically require ongoing injections over several years, QUICK-LI delivers allergen extract directly into a lymph node using ultrasound guidance. The treatment consists of three visits over approximately eight weeks, offering eligible patients a lower-burden approach to immunotherapy.

By targeting the lymph node directly, QUICK-LI is designed to retrain the immune system efficiently with fewer doses. Many patients begin noticing improvement within weeks to a few months following their final treatment, with benefits designed to continue long term. Traditional allergy shots and tablets remain excellent options, particularly for patients who prefer an insurance-covered treatment and can commit to an ongoing schedule. QUICK-LI provides another choice for patients seeking a more streamlined approach that fits their individual needs and lifestyles.

"QUICK-LI gives us another option for patients who may benefit from immunotherapy but are looking for a treatment that requires significantly fewer visits. We're excited to be the first practice in Michigan to offer this innovative approach and to continue bringing advanced allergy treatment options to West Michigan," said Dr. Uekert.

Allergies and asthma can look different at every stage of life.

A child navigating food allergies or eczema may have very different needs than an adult managing seasonal allergies, chronic sinus symptoms or hives. At Grand Rapids Allergy, caring for patients across the lifespan means looking beyond the diagnosis to understand how symptoms affect everyday life.

That personalized approach has remained at the heart of the practice even as treatments, technology and patient needs have evolved. The philosophy is simple: listen first, understand each patient's needs and create a path toward feeling better.

More than five decades after opening its doors, Grand Rapids Allergy continues to combine experience with evolving treatments and personalized care for patients of all ages. With deep roots in West Michigan, the team remains focused on creating lasting relationships with patients and families while continuing to bring new options to the community it serves.

