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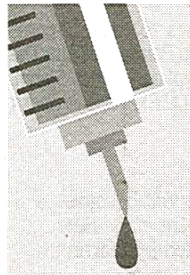
Your Health

By Kim Painter

Readers ask for guidance

Today, I reach into the mailbag for reader questions. Is a normal blood-glucose level the same for everyone? Is red-yeast rice a good cholesterol treatment? And what's in those allergy shots?

Q: I took allergy shots in the 1970s. What else is in them or was in them back then? Any mercury or aluminum? — Paul Finney, 47, Omaha



A: There's no mercury or aluminum in today's allergy shots, says Stanley Fineman, an Atlanta allergist and vice president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology.

Allergy shots, now as then, contain proteins extracted from the substances that cause allergic reactions — so-called “allergens,” such as grass pollen and cat dander. Each patient gets customized shots containing the allergens that cause their symptoms. Doses rise over time to build immune system tolerance. The shots are drawn from personalized vials that also contain some glycerin (a non-toxic liquid) and serum albumin (a purified protein) to dilute and stabilize the mixture, Fineman says.

“Forty years ago, there may have been some preparations called allergy shots” that had other ingredients, he says.

Also worth knowing: The allergens in today's shots are more refined and targeted than they were decades ago, and the doses are standardized. That means they often work better, Fineman says.