

Side Effects of Immunotherapy

What is immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is a treatment that helps your body's immune system fight cancer. The immune system is your body's natural defense system. There are several types of immunotherapy that work in different ways. These medicines are also called "biologics."

You can have immunotherapy by itself or with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other treatments. Immunotherapy is given in a doctor's office or in the hospital, usually through a vein (intravenously or IV). Your cancer care team will closely monitor your health during and after this type of treatment.

What side effects can immunotherapy cause?

Immunotherapy is different from traditional chemotherapy, and it can cause different side effects. These are different for each person. **That is why it is important to let your health care team know right away about any changes in how you are feeling.**



Side effects depend on the medication, your dose and treatment schedule, cancer type, general health, and other factors. Immunotherapy side effects may happen during treatment, after some time following each treatment, or months or years after treatment ends. They can include:

- **Skin and hair changes.** Rashes, blisters, swelling, itching, dry skin, and/or sensitivity to the sun. You might also notice hair loss or extra hair growth.
- **Flu-like symptoms.** Fever, chills, headache, weakness, fatigue, nausea, and/or vomiting. Your body might feel achy, like you have the flu. Immunotherapy can also cause muscle and joint pain.
- **Hormone changes.** For example, immunotherapy might affect your thyroid gland. If it cannot make enough thyroid hormone, you might gain weight and feel very tired. Your doctor may monitor your hormone levels during treatment, depending on what type of immunotherapy you receive.
- **Other side effects.** These can include breathing problems, swelling in your legs, stomach pain, changes in bowel movements, vision changes, sinus congestion, or numbness, tingling, and pain in your hands and feet.

Immunotherapy may be more likely to cause side effects if you take more than 1 type of immunotherapy or take other medicines, including chemotherapy, at the same time.

Can these side effects be treated?

Yes. Many immunotherapy side effects can be treated. Let your doctor know about any new, continuing, or worsening medical problems you have, even if you don't think it is serious or are unsure if it is related to the immunotherapy. For certain ongoing problems, you might see a specialist. For example, you may see a dermatologist for skin problems, an endocrinologist (hormone specialist) for hormone problems, or a gastroenterologist for digestive problems.

Some side effects are serious and need treatment right away. If you need medical care at an emergency room or other place not familiar with your cancer treatment, be sure to tell them that you are receiving "immunotherapy" for cancer.

How can I avoid side effects of immunotherapy?

Talking with your doctor is the best way to prevent and manage immunotherapy side effects. Ask what to expect with your type of immunotherapy and how to avoid side effects, if possible. If side effects are likely, ask how they will be treated and when to call your doctor.

Side effects: Know what to look for

Side effects of immunotherapy can be mild, moderate, or even life-threatening. **Talk with your doctor to learn which side effects need immediate medical care.** With the help of your health care team, check off or circle the immunotherapy side effects that you should watch for. Make copies, if you need to, and bring them with you to your appointments or any place where you receive medical care.

Immunotherapy drug and dose _____

Type of cancer _____ **Cancer stage** _____

Possible side effects of this immunotherapy medication*

Any one of these could be a sign of a serious problem. Contact your doctor if you experience a side effect of immunotherapy.

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fever | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating more | <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea, vomiting | <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in vision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling faint, passing out | <input type="checkbox"/> Numbness or tingling | <input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blood in urine or dark urine | <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion | <input type="checkbox"/> Fast heartbeat | <input type="checkbox"/> Constipation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle and joint pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Tiredness | <input type="checkbox"/> More sensitive to light | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain in belly area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cough | <input type="checkbox"/> Rash, itching, blisters | <input type="checkbox"/> Stiff neck | <input type="checkbox"/> Hair loss or extra growth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Weakness | <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss or gain | <input type="checkbox"/> Seizures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bleeding or bruising easily | <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow skin or eyes | <input type="checkbox"/> Body aches | <input type="checkbox"/> Swelling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | |

What other medical treatments are you receiving? _____

I should contact my doctor's office right away if I have these serious side effects: _____

Doctor's name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

For more information on the side effects of immunotherapy, visit www.cancer.net/sideeffectsimmuo. Download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app to track and monitor side effects.

*This is not a complete list. Be sure to talk with your doctor about the side effects of immunotherapy.

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