

# Cancer Immunotherapy

## ► What is Cancer Immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is a type of cancer treatment that is designed to help a person's immune system recognize and attack cancer cells.

The immune system detects and protects the body from anything it perceives as foreign, such as viruses, bacteria, and even cells that are abnormal because they are cancerous. However, cancer has ways to evade the immune system. Cancer immunotherapy may help the immune system recognize cancer cells and activate specific immune cells to target and attack them. As a potential side effect, immunotherapy could cause the immune system to attack normal organs and tissue in the body.

Immunotherapy with BCG administered inside the bladder has long been used to treat non-muscle invasive bladder cancer. Systemic therapy with cancer immunotherapy can now be used to treat locally advanced or metastatic *urothelial carcinoma*, the most common type of bladder cancer. Specifically, it can be used when your bladder cancer has spread (metastatic) and/or cannot be removed by surgery. Currently, systemic immunotherapy is approved for use in patients who have had platinum-based chemotherapy and it has either not worked or stopped working.

## ► What happens during treatment with a cancer immunotherapy?

Cancer immunotherapy is typically administered as an intravenous (IV) infusion through a needle placed in a vein while under medical supervision. Your **oncologist** will decide how many treatments you need, and it's important to keep all your appointments.



## ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

- What **stage** is my bladder cancer and how does it affect my treatment options?
- Is cancer immunotherapy a good option for me?
- What are the potential benefits and side effects of immunotherapy?
- How often do I have to get immunotherapy treatment?
- How long will the immunotherapy treatment last?
- Are there any problems, other medical conditions or medicines (including prescription, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements) you need to know about before I receive immunotherapy?
- Are there any problems I might have during immunotherapy that I should tell you about?
- What can I do to prepare? Can I eat or drink before the procedure?

Always consider  
a 2nd Opinion



## TERMS TO KNOW

- **Cancer Immunotherapy:** A type of cancer treatment that helps a person's immune system recognize and attack cancer cells.
- **Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer.
- **Stage:** The extent of cancer within the body, especially whether the disease has spread from the original site to other parts of the body.
- **Urothelial carcinoma:** A type of bladder cancer that accounts for 90 percent of all cases of the disease and can also be found in the *renal pelvis*, *ureter* and *urethra*.
- **Renal pelvis:** The area at the center of the kidney where urine collects and then is funneled into the ureter.
- **Ureter:** The tube that carries urine from the kidney to the urinary bladder.
- **Urethra:** The tube through which urine empties from the bladder.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW: Advice from bladder cancer patients who have experience with immunotherapy treatment

### BEFORE IMMUNOTHERAPY



- Work with your doctor to find the best place to receive treatment, which might be your doctor's office, an infusion center, or a community or academic hospital.
- Try to schedule your appointments for the same day of the week and the same time of day to make them easier to remember.
- Set aside enough time in your day for your infusion.
- Make sure to follow any guidelines for eating or drinking before the treatment.
- Bring a friend or family member to keep you company and to take notes on what the doctor tells you.

### DURING IMMUNOTHERAPY



- Bring reading material or music to occupy you while you receive the infusion.
- Think positively. Try to relax as much as possible, and don't be afraid to ask questions and tell the doctor or nurse what you are feeling.
- Bring a snack or light lunch to your treatment as sometimes it can take a few hours between getting bloodwork, physician visit and infusion.
- Other patients going through therapy can be great sources of support and information. Develop relationships at the treatment suite and exchange contact information. Or see if the hospital has a patient support group.

### AFTER IMMUNOTHERAPY



- Tell your medical team right away if you notice any changes in your health or if you have a reaction from the infusion. It's also important to tell your medical team if any of these problems get worse.
- Discuss with your health care team when you can increase physical activity.

## NEXT STEPS:

- Your doctor will monitor your cancer and recommend how long to proceed with immunotherapy.
- It can be helpful to talk to someone who has experienced immunotherapy. Call the BCAN Survivor 2 Survivor program to connect with a volunteer who knows about having immunotherapy. Dial 888-901-BCAN.

## The Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network (BCAN)

BCAN's mission is to increase public awareness about bladder cancer, advance bladder cancer research, and provide educational and support services for the bladder cancer community.



[www.bcan.org](http://www.bcan.org)



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