

# BCG TREATMENT

## What is BCG?

BCG (Bacille Calmette-Guerin) is a weak form of bacteria used to fight bladder cancer. It works by boosting the body's immune system to attack cancer cells. BCG is given directly into the bladder as a liquid and does not go into your bloodstream. It is a common treatment for bladder cancer that hasn't spread into the muscle wall, especially for patients with high-grade tumors (more risky cancer cells that are still in the bladder lining but not within the bladder muscle). What happens during BCG treatment?

BCG is an immunotherapy given inside the bladder (called "intravesical immunotherapy"). Your doctor puts a liquid containing BCG into your bladder using a tube called a catheter. This process is called "instillation."

The medicine mainly affects the inside lining of the bladder. It has little or no effect on other parts of your body. This treatment helps your immune system attack the cancer cells in the bladder.



- You hold BCG in your bladder for up to two hours
- BCG treatment is usually given once a week for six weeks
- Your doctor may recommend more BCG treatments after this, which is called "maintenance BCG therapy."

## ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

### Why is BCG a good option for me?

- *How successful is BCG for someone my age, with my type and stage of tumor?*
- *When will I know that the BCG is working?*

### What is involved in having BCG?

- *How many treatments will I have and how often?*
- *Where will I get the BCG? Will I stay at the clinic the whole time or can I go home while I hold the BCG in my bladder?*
- *Who can I talk to if I have questions or need help? What is your experience with BCG treatment?*

### What options do I have if BCG does not work?

## TERMS TO KNOW

- **Catheter:** A thin tube inserted into the bladder to drain urine or deliver treatment.
- **Immunotherapy:** A treatment that uses the body's immune system to fight diseases, like cancer.
- **Intravesical:** A treatment delivered directly into the bladder.
- **TURBT:** A transurethral resection of the bladder tumor (TURBT) is a surgery that removes bladder tumors and helps diagnose and stage bladder cancer.

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

### BEFORE BCG TREATMENT

- If you grew up outside the U.S., you might have had BCG as a vaccine. Let your healthcare team know before starting BCG treatment.
- Try to schedule your appointment at a day and time that works for you.
- Bring music, a book, or something to keep you distracted while holding the BCG in your bladder.
- BCG won't be given until your bladder has healed from any TURBT surgery. This helps lower the risk of BCG getting into your bloodstream.
- Be ready to give a urine sample before your BCG treatment. If there are signs of infection, the treatment will be delayed until the infection clears.
- You may be asked not to eat or drink for a certain time before the treatment.
- It's a good idea to bring a friend or family member for support and to help take notes.

### DURING BCG TREATMENT

- A thin tube (catheter) will be used to put the liquid medication into your bladder.
- Some doctors may ask you to lie down and change positions so the drug can cover your entire bladder.
- If you feel nervous, medications are available to help you relax during the treatment.

### SIDE EFFECTS OF INTRAVESICAL IMMUNOTHERAPY



ALWAYS SPEAK TO YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ANY NEW OR WORSENING SIDE EFFECTS

### AFTER BCG TREATMENT

- Tell your medical team if you experience any side effects. BCG can cause:
  - flu-like symptoms
  - fever
  - chills
  - fatigue
  - the urge to urinate
  - painful urination
  - symptoms of a urinary tract infection
  - blood or clots in your urine

Ask your doctor or nurse about prescription or over-the-counter treatments, like medications, creams, or heating pads, that can help with side effects.

Make sure to get instructions from your health-care team about safety steps (like using bleach in your toilet) after you urinate following BCG treatment. • Drink plenty of water and other non-caffeinated liquids after each treatment to help flush out the medicine.

- Plan to take it easy and rest for the day following your BCG treatment.
- Call your medical team if you have questions or something does not feel right.

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## NEXT STEPS

- You will still need regular cystoscopies to look into your bladder to make sure the tumors have not come back.
- After the first cycle of BCG, your doctor may suggest maintenance cycles of BCG.
- It can be helpful to talk to someone who has experienced BCG. Call the BCAN Survivor 2 Survivor program at 888-901-BCAN to connect with a volunteer who knows about having BCG treatment.



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to learn more.

## 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.*



888-901-BCAN (2226)



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