

Patient information factsheet

Immunotherapy treatment: frequently asked questions

Your doctor will have given you some specific information about the drug(s) that you are going to be given to treat your cancer and the side effects that can occur as a result. We've given you this factsheet to answer some of the other questions you might have.

Can I drive myself to and from having treatment?

Unless your doctor has told you not to drive, you can drive yourself to and from your treatment session. You should not feel any different immediately after the treatment to how you felt before.

Can I bring someone with me for company when I am being given the treatment?

Yes, you are welcome to bring a family member or friend with you.

Am I more at risk of getting infections while I'm having this treatment?

You are no more likely to get infections than you would be normally. This treatment activates your immune system and helps it to work better. It is not the same as chemotherapy which suppresses the immune system.

What if I get side effects from the treatment but they are not very severe?

It is really important that you report any side effects from treatment early on, as this means we are likely to be able to manage them quickly and ensure you can continue having your treatment where possible.

Will I lose my hair?

It is extremely rare to lose your hair while receiving this treatment but it might become thinner. Occasionally hair can turn white but this is also rare.

You can have your hair coloured or permed when receiving this treatment.

Can I have vaccinations while I am on this treatment?

You should not have immunisations with live vaccines while you are having this treatment or for at least six months afterwards. In the UK, these include rubella, mumps, measles (usually given together as MMR), BCG, yellow fever and Zostavax (shingles vaccine). It is safe to have other vaccines, such as the flu vaccine. It is safe for you to be in contact with other people who've had live vaccines as injections. There's usually no problem in being with any baby or child who has recently had any vaccination in the UK.

You can find out more about this at: www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping-with-cancer/coping-practically/travel/travelling-abroad#vaccine

Patient information factsheet

Can I take 'over the counter drugs' while I am having this treatment?

You can take any drugs that you can buy from your local chemist while you are on this treatment. However, if you are getting new, unusual or different symptoms, please contact your nurse specialists for advice.

Can I take herbal supplements to help with my cancer treatment?

Please talk to your consultant before taking any herbal or alternative remedies for your cancer.

Can I have dental work while having this treatment?

You can have dental work as is necessary. If your dentist wishes to discuss this further with your healthcare team, please ask them to contact your clinical nurse specialist.

Can I go to work while I am having treatment?

It is likely that you will be able to continue to work while you are having your treatment. However, people tend to find they get tired more easily. It would be wise to alert your employer and your occupational health department (if you have one) to the fact that you are having treatment so that they can support you appropriately.

Can I have sexual intercourse while having treatment?

You may experience physical and emotional changes during and after treatment. These may affect your desire and ability to have sex. Even treatments not targeting reproductive organs may affect your body image, mood, energy levels and sense of well-being.

There is no clinical reason not to have sexual intimacy during immunotherapy treatment. We advise that contraception is used at all times to avoid pregnancy during treatment.

Please talk to one of the team if you have further concerns or questions.

Do I need to take special care about pregnancy during immunotherapy?

It is unclear if immunotherapy would cause damage to an unborn child. It is also possible that immunotherapy might affect the chance of conceiving for women, or fathering children for men. We advise you to use contraception at all times to avoid pregnancy during immunotherapy treatment. Sperm banking can be offered before starting immunotherapy unless treatment needs to be started urgently.

Can I go on holiday in between treatments?

This may be possible but please discuss it with your consultant in advance of booking, particularly if you are thinking about travelling abroad. It is also important to plan how to manage any side effects when you are away. Please discuss this with your consultant.

It can be difficult to secure insurance for any cancer or treatment-related problems while on holiday. You can find more advice about holiday insurance at:

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/organising/travel-and-holidays/travel-insurance.

Can I exercise while I am having the treatment?

There are very good reasons for exercising. It can help to improve quality of life and help you to feel better. Regular exercise can reduce stress and give you more energy. Some studies have shown that regular exercise can help reduce the fatigue caused by cancer treatments.

If you were used to exercising before treatment, you might need to exercise less than usual or at a lower intensity during treatment. The goal is to stay as active and fit as possible. People who were very sedentary (inactive) before cancer treatment may need to start with short, low-intensity activity, such as short slow walks. Please ask your consultant or clinical nurse specialist if you have any questions about exercise.

Can I have a massage?

In most circumstances there's no reason not to have a massage but please speak to your consultant before planning one.

Contact us

If you experience any side effects of your treatment, please contact the acute oncology service on **023 8120 1345** (24-hour emergency phone).

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.