

Immunotherapy is a way of treating cancer, by using your body's immune system to fight cancer cells. It is sometimes called **biological therapy**.

Immunotherapy may be used alone or with other cancer treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

### How does immunotherapy work?

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Everyone's body is designed to protect itself against diseases, including cancer. One of your body's main defense systems against disease is the immune system. It is a complex system of cells and organs working to protect your health, by finding and killing things that might threaten your body. The immune system can attack germs (bacteria), viruses, and some types of cancer.

Immunotherapy uses substances to boost your body's immune system, so it will attack and kill the cancer cells. These substances are similar to those in your own immune system.

They are called **BMRs** (Biologic Response Modifiers). They can help:

- Cure your cancer.
- Stop cancer cells from growing.
- Help healthy immune cells control cancer cells.
- Reduce the risk of cancer coming back.
- Reduce the side effects caused by some cancer treatments.

### Why is immunotherapy best for me?

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Immunotherapy can provide good results for some types of cancer. Your health care team will explain why it is the best treatment for you.

### How is treatment given?

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How and where you get immunotherapy depends on the type of BMRs that your doctor will suggest for you. Treatments are usually given by injection into a vein (called intravenous) or under the skin (called subcutaneous).

Some of the BMRs used are: interferons (IFN); interleukins (IL); tumour necrosis factor (TNF); colony-stimulating factors (CSFs); monoclonal antibodies (MOABs); and, tumour vaccines.

## What are the side effects of immunotherapy?

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Like other cancer treatments, immunotherapy can cause side effects. Some people do not have any side effects; other people have some or many side effects. No one knows exactly which side effects you might have until you begin your treatment.

Your health care team will give you more details about the side effects that you might have and how to cope with them.

**Please keep in mind that side effects are NOT a sign of how well the treatment is working against your cancer.**

## How can I cope with my cancer and treatment?

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It is normal for you and your family to have many feelings at this time. Talk with your doctor, nurse, or someone else on your health care team about your feelings.

Your doctor and nurse are there to answer your questions and to help you.

## Questions to ask your health care team

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- Why is immunotherapy the best treatment for me?
- What type of immunotherapy will I get?
- What are the benefits and risks of immunotherapy for me?
- How and where will I get immunotherapy?
- Who can be with me during my treatment?
- How will we know if the treatment worked?
- Will I be able to go to work when I'm having this treatment?
- Can I keep doing the things that I used to do? What should I not do?
- Will this treatment affect whether or not I can have children?
- Can I travel or take a vacation when I'm having this treatment?
- How often will I see my cancer doctor during my treatment?
- What happens when the treatment ends?

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This fact sheet is meant to support the information that your health care team gives you. It is also meant to encourage you to ask questions to your health care team. This fact sheet does **not** replace any information that your healthcare team gives you.

Living Well With Cancer is a partnership among several people living with cancer, health care professionals, people who represent cancer and professional organizations, and Ortho Biotech. The LWWC partnership gratefully acknowledges the input of the QEII Health Sciences Centre in this fact sheet.

Living Well With Cancer Information Centre

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