

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

How does immunotherapy work?

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 cancers.

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 **BRMs (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?

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?

How and where you get immunotherapy depends on the type of BRMs 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 BRMs used are: interferons (IFN); interleukins (IL); tumour necrosis factor (TNF); colony-stimulating factors (CSFs); monoclonal antibodies (MOABs); and tumour vaccines.

Looking for more information on this topic?

You can contact the Canadian Cancer Society at www.cancer.ca or call the Cancer Information Service of the Cancer Society at 1-888-939-3333. You can also contact your local public library for books, videos, magazine articles and online health information. For a list of public libraries in Nova Scotia go to <http://publiclibraries.ns.ca>.

Cancer Care Nova Scotia has made an electronic patient education program, the Oncology Interactive Education Series (OIES), available in most health districts in Nova Scotia. Please check with your health care team, your Cancer Patient Navigator, or your health care library to see if this program is available in your district and to learn how to use the program.

For more information visit *Cancer Care Nova Scotia's* website www.cancercare.ns.ca



Capital Health

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What are the side effects of immunotherapy?

Like other cancer treatments, immunotherapy can cause side effects. Some people do not have any side effects; other people may have a few 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 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 worked against your cancer.

How can I cope with my cancer and treatment?

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.

All team members will answer your questions and help you.

Questions to ask your health care team

- 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 the treatments?
- Who can be with me during my treatments?
- How will we know if the treatments worked?
- Will I be able to go to work when I'm having my treatments?
- 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 the treatments?
- How often will I see my cancer doctor during my treatments?
- What happens when the treatment ends?