

Switch On To Immunotherapy



**Mater Misericordiae
University Hospital**

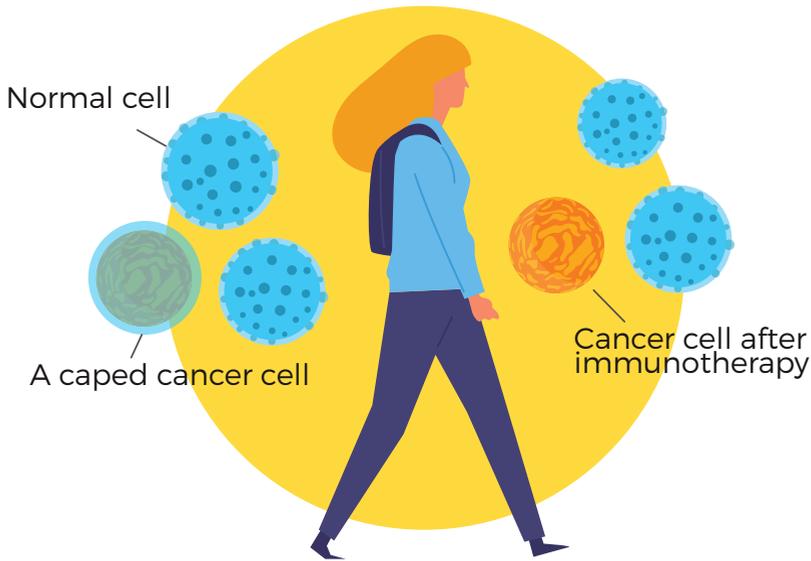


Introduction

This booklet aims to explain cancer immunotherapy and give you the information you need to feel more in control of your treatment and care. Many patients experience a good quality of life while on immunotherapy treatment which helps them to manage their disease and their lives effectively.

With this knowledge we hope that you are fully informed on how your treatment works, the side effects and where to look for support. A gentle reminder that we are here to support you every step of the way on your cancer journey.

**Cancer Nurse Specialist Team,
The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Dublin.**



What is immunotherapy?

Cancer cells often disguise themselves in your body with molecules or a 'cape' so that the immune system thinks they are normal cells ¹.

Immunotherapy is sometimes described as lifting off the cape that is disguising cancer cells to help your immune system recognise and fight the bad cells.

Immunotherapy is a new and innovative treatment that helps your body to defend itself against cancer ². It works with your immune system to fight and destroy cancer cells ².

Immunotherapy is a revolutionary new treatment and an advancement in cancer care.



Cancer Nurse Specialist

Immunotherapy treatment **activates** your immune system, helping to **detect cancer cells**, and may help your body to recognise and **defeat or halt this disease**.

Cancer Nurse Specialist



When I heard that immunotherapy doesn't have an effect on hair loss, I thought that was great, happy days!



Tara, immunotherapy patient

You know that this particular type of treatment is doing one thing. It's not killing off the rest of your good cells, it's attacking the bad cells, the cancer, within your body.

Mark, immunotherapy patient



The immune system is a network of cells, tissue and organs that protects your body from infection and diseases such as cancer.²

Immunotherapy is used to treat different types of cancer and causes less side effects, so you won't lose your hair during treatment⁴ as it is considered less toxic than chemotherapy.

Immunotherapy increases your body's natural defences and activates your immune system to fight the bad cells caused by cancer.²

The cancer cells are then destroyed or can be slowed down so that your cancer may not spread.²





What does immunotherapy treatment involve?

Your immunotherapy treatment will be given to you in hospital. Your cancer specialist team will go through your health checks first to make sure you are ok to receive your immunotherapy treatment. Once the health checks are completed your nurse will insert an intravenous (IV) drip, which is a thin tube, into a vein in your arm so that the treatment can enter your body. This is called an IV infusion and will take approximately 30-90 minutes.

Sometimes the health checks and treatment can take a full day, or at the minimum a half day, to be completed.

Your cancer specialist team will explain each step of the process to you.

The main thing for me with immunotherapy treatment is having control over things, because when you have cancer you don't have any control over anything.



Tara, immunotherapy patient

We've had a very good success rate to date, where all Dad's scans have shown the tumours have reduced in his lungs and lymph nodes, so it has been a very good success story.



Kristina, daughter of an immunotherapy patient



How will I feel during immunotherapy treatment?

Most patients do not experience serious side effects of treatment.

Someone said to me recently, “you wouldn’t think you were taking anything, or that you were even sick”.

Patrick, immunotherapy patient



Immunotherapy allows you to be able to do the things that you would ordinarily do, and feel the way that you ordinarily would, with the exception that you’ve got cancer. But overall I feel great.

Mark, immunotherapy patient



Practical tips for your hospital appointments:

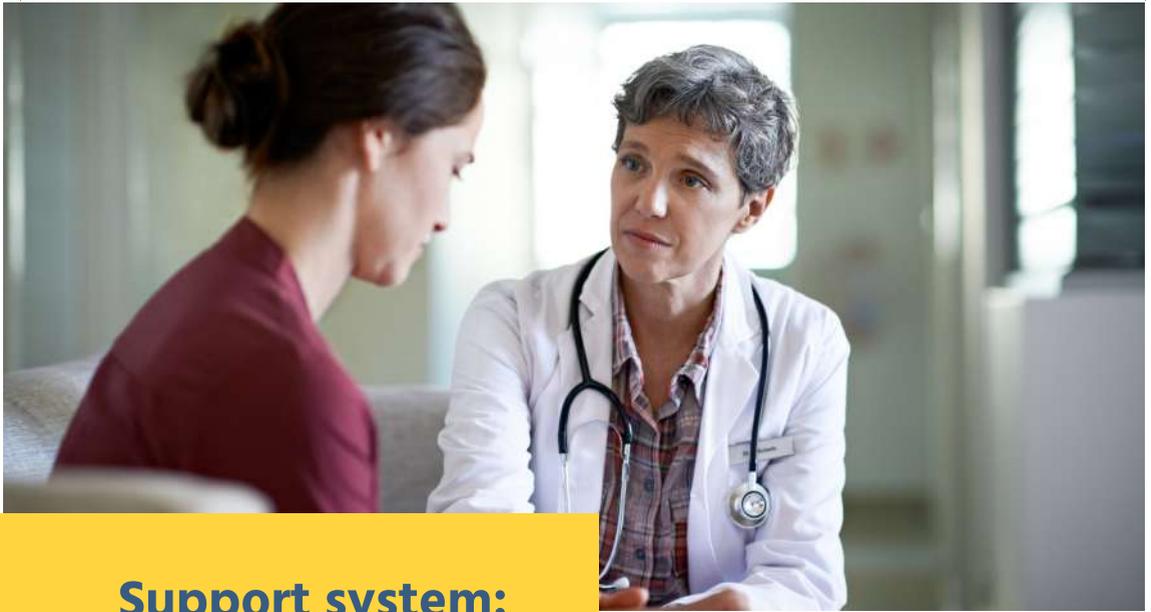


First visit:

-  When you visit the hospital for your first appointment, please bring your normal medications.
-  Don't fast on the morning of your treatment.

All hospital visits:

-  Wear comfortable clothes, tops that are bare from the elbow down or are easy to roll above the elbow.
-  Wear comfortable shoes for walking as you might like to go for a walk while waiting for treatment.
-  Bring a book/magazine/newspaper/iPad with you to keep yourself entertained. There is also a bookshelf for you to avail of books in the Oncology/Haematology Day Unit (OHU).
-  Bring snacks if you wish. Tea, coffee and sandwiches are provided at various intervals during the day by the hospital's kitchen department and there is also a coffee machine in OHU.



Support system:

Your cancer specialist team is here to support you throughout your treatment.

Support services can include access to dieticians, social workers and transport to hospital for treatment.

There are also other support systems available through the Irish Cancer Society, ARC House and the Marie Keating Foundation.

These organisations offer a range of services and advice for living with cancer.

I have an amazing support system of family and friends that are second to none and I would be lost without them.



Mark, immunotherapy patient

I still go back to the day when the doctor said to me, 'In a couple of years this will feel like a bad dream.' And that's the way it is now, it's starting to fade. Don't look back on your treatment, look forward to your future.

Joe, father of an immunotherapy patient





Frequently asked questions

1. How is immunotherapy different to other cancer treatments?

Research and developments in cancer treatment are happening every day. Immunotherapy is a revolutionary new treatment and an advancement in cancer care.

Immunotherapy is a treatment that boosts your immune system to recognise and kill cancer cells which it would ordinarily ignore. Unlike chemotherapy which kills all rapidly dividing cells in the body.





2. How long is the treatment? How long will I be on immunotherapy?

Treatment, which includes health checks such as nursing assessment, vital signs, blood testing and in some cases doctors' review, and an immunotherapy IV infusion, can take several hours, sometimes half a day. Treatment can be either every two or three weeks.

The immunotherapy is made on the day in pharmacy when it is confirmed that you are well enough to have treatment.

Your cancer specialist team will decide how long you need to stay on immunotherapy.

3. What are the potential side effects?

Most patients do not experience serious side effects, but you do need to be aware of the potential side effects so that you can recognise them.

You should contact your cancer specialist team straight away if they occur.

As immunotherapy stimulates the immune system the main side effects are autoimmune where your immune system incorrectly targets healthy tissue in your body causing it to be inflamed.

Please refer to www.medicines.ie for more product specific side effects.





4. Will I lose my hair?

No, immunotherapy does not cause hair loss.

5. Will I be toxic to anyone around me?

No, immunotherapy does not have any effect on other people around you including children.

6. Can I lead an active lifestyle while I am on treatment?

Yes it is important to eat a well-balanced diet and partake in regular exercise while on immunotherapy.

7. When/how will I know it is working?

You will be scanned as deemed appropriate by your consultant. As immunotherapy can cause some inflammation at the site of your cancer sometimes the first scan can be unclear, your second scan is used to determine if it is working effectively.

Now that my treatment is finished, I feel like I'm getting my life back on track.



Tara, immunotherapy patient

8. Do I have to come to my treating hospital if I have any side effects or can I go to my local hospital?

Please go to your treating hospital where possible.





9. Do I need to use contraception while on immunotherapy?

It is important to use appropriate contraception while on immunotherapy as it may affect the unborn child.

Please inform your nurse/doctor immediately if you think you may be pregnant.

10. Is immunotherapy suitable for all cancer patients?

Immunotherapy is increasingly used for a variety of different cancers but it is important to recognise that it doesn't suit all patients or all cancers.

Your oncologist will discuss this with you.



11. Can I join a clinical trial?

Your cancer specialist team will decide if you are suitable to be put forward for clinical trials, where possible.

A year ago, I couldn't see a future. Now I'm starting to make plans again because I honestly believe that I have one. And that's thanks to immunotherapy treatment.



Mark, immunotherapy patient

You nearly forget about the treatment process, and because Dad is looking so well and having great results on it, it goes to the back of your mind.



Kristina, daughter of an immunotherapy patient

Please speak to your cancer specialist team if you have any further questions and to learn more about immunotherapy.



Mater Hospital useful information

Coffee shops:

- Cafe Sol is on level 1 and on level 3 in the McGivney Wing and sells pastries, freshly-made sandwiches, soup, salads and hot food.
- The Canteen is on level 2 in the Misericordiae Wing and serves a full range of hot meals.
- Starbucks is on level 1 in the Whitty Wing and sells pastries, and ready-made sandwiches.
- Costa Coffee on level 0 in the Whitty Wing serves pastries and has a small shop.

ATM and phone-charging:

- There is an ATM on level 1 in the McGivney Wing outside Cafe Sol.
- A phone-charging station can be found on hospital street in the Whitty Wing.

Dear GP,

This patient _____ is currently being treated for cancer with an immunotherapy treatment named _____.

Some potential side effects are listed below and if this patient presents with any of these, please refer him/her to the Mater Hospital for assessment immediately.

Do not give this patient steroids and make sure to check with the Cancer Nurse Specialist Team at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Dublin before treating him/her for stomach bugs or any issue which might be a potential side effect of this treatment.

- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Feeling or being sick
- Dry, itchy skin, skin rash
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Breathlessness and a dry cough, caused by inflammation of the lungs
- This medication can also disrupt the liver, kidneys and hormone-making glands such as the thyroid
- Muscle weakness and tingling in fingers
- Headaches and stiff neck
- Changes to urine

For product specific adverse events please consult www.medicines.ie

Kind regards,

**Cancer Nurse Specialist Team,
The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Dublin.**





For more information please visit these websites:

- The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital website: www.mater.ie
- The Irish Cancer Society: www.cancer.ie
- Cancer Care: www.cancerireland.ie
- The Marie Keating Foundation: www.mariekeating.ie

References

1. Cancer Research UK: Accessed January 2019. <https://scienceblog.cancerresearchuk.org/2016/10/20/seeing-past-cancers-invisibility-cloak/>
2. ASCO Answers: Understanding Immunotherapy. Accessed December 2018. https://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_immunotherapy.pdf
3. Cancer Research UK. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/treatment/immunotherapy/what-is-immunotherapy>
4. Cancer Research Institute. Accessed December 2018. <https://www.cancerresearch.org/immunotherapy/what-is-immunotherapy>
5. National Comprehensive Cancer Network: Understanding Immunotherapy side effects. Accessed December 2018. https://www.nccn.org/images/pdf/Immunotherapy_Infographic.pdf

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This information booklet was developed by the Cancer Nurse Specialist team at The Mater Misericordiae University Hospital Dublin, in partnership with Roche Products (Ireland) Limited.



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