

**This is the transcript for the video titled as: Cancer Specialist Nursing Team answer Frequently Asked Questions.**

The team members who provide these answers in the video are:

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**Question 1: How does it work?**

**Answer:**

The way immunotherapy works is it activates your immune system to recognise the cancer cells that otherwise disguise themselves.

Once your body recognises and detects cancer cells, immunotherapy helps to defeat or halt your disease. The one important thing to remember about immunotherapy is that it is actually completely different to chemotherapy. It has completely different side effects, and this is very important during your treatment to know.

**Question 2: How long does treatment take?**

**Answer:**

So your treatment date depends on different factors. First of all, when you come into the day ward you will have health checks.

They’ll do a full nursing assessment, including your vital signs, checking your blood results. A nursing assessment is done in the day ward, potentially a doctor’s review, an IV canula is inserted, and your treatment is ordered with pharmacy.

It is also really important to remember that your immunotherapy is not made by pharmacy until you are actually here in the hospital and the nurses deem that you are fit to go ahead with your treatment.

When your IV infusion is complete and you are well, you can go home.

**Question 3: How long will I be on immunotherapy?**

**Answer:**

The length of time that patients are on immunotherapy differs from patient to patient. It can be as long as two years for some people.



The one important thing to know is that, on occasion, with immunotherapy you can develop a serious side effect. And this may require you to be admitted into the hospital.

It also depends on how your cancer is responding to the immunotherapy treatment, which should be checked with routine scans as dictated by your consultant.

**Question 4: How is immunotherapy different to other cancer treatments?**

**Answer:**

Immunotherapy is different from treatments in that it's innovative, it's new. Unlike chemotherapy, which works on rapidly dividing cells, immunotherapy works by boosting your immune system and helping your immune system to identify the tumour cell, and in effect, destroy that tumour cell.

**Question 5: Are there any potential side effects I need to be aware of?**

**Answer:**

Most of our patients do not experience the more serious side effects, but it would be important to make yourself aware of them before you start your treatment, so that you can recognise them if they do happen and report them to your cancer specialist team immediately.

Because immunotherapy stimulates your immune system, sometimes it can incorrectly target the healthy tissues in your body, which causes them to become inflamed, which is where the side effects come from. They can, however, become quite difficult to recognise.

The main things to look out for are:

**[Title card text] Respiratory**

New onset of a cough, shortness of breath or chest pain could indicate a lung problem called pneumonitis.

**[Title card text] Gastro-intestinal**

That would include an increase in your normal bowel movements to diarrhoea. Could include black, tarry or sometimes bloody stools, tummy aches or pains, or cramps. This could indicate a bowel problem called colitis.

**[Title card text] Skin**

Skin could include an extensive rash or itch

**[Title card text] Liver**

Liver could include yellowing of the skin or eyes, pain on the right side of your abdomen, nausea or vomiting, an increase in bruising and bleeding. This could be a problem called hepatitis.

Less common side effects include constipation, headaches, blurring of your vision, confusion, muscle aches or joint pains, numbness or tingling in your hands or your feet, and there have been rare fatalities. Side effects can occur at any stage throughout your treatment up to and including one year.



**Question 6: How are the side effects treated?**

**Answer:**

Side effects from immunotherapy are treated under close observation from your medical team. Treatments include IV rehydration, may include steroids, hormone replacement or surveillance. Your GP may not be fully familiar with the side effects associated with immunotherapy, and for that reason we ask that you carry your alert card with you at all times.

**Question 7: Will immunotherapy work for me?**

**Answer:**

Like most treatments, we cannot guarantee that it will cure your cancer. However you will be monitored regularly with scans as directed by your consultant.

**Question 8: Will I be toxic to anyone around me?**

**Answer:**

No, there are no toxicities to anyone around you. This includes your loved ones, and to reassure you, there will be no harmful side effects to children in your care.

**Question 9: When or how will I know it's working?**

**Answer:**

You will be scanned regularly as determined by your consultant. However as we know, immunotherapy causes inflammation to the cancer site. The first scan may be unclear, however the second scan will determine how effective immunotherapy has been for you.

**Question 10: Can I lead an active lifestyle while I am on treatment?**

**Answer:**

It is important to lead an active lifestyle and participate in regular exercise while on immunotherapy. It is also important to eat a well-balanced diet.

**Question 11: Can I go back to work while on treatment?**

**Answer:**

Returning to work will have to be discussed with your medical team, however you may be required to take a period of time out of work when you commence treatment.

**Question 12: Can I take my regular medication?**

**Answer:**

It is really important that you bring your normal medication with you to the hospital on your first visit.

This will allow the healthcare professional, be it the doctor or the nurse, to assess for potential interactions with your immunotherapy. This includes any alternative or complimentary medicine that you're using.



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**Question 13: What about fertility, breastfeeding or pregnancy?**

**Answer:**

There are no studies that have assessed the impact that immunotherapy has on your fertility so it is really important to know this. It is also really important to know that you should use contraception while on immunotherapy, as we don't know how this may affect the unborn child.

Please inform your nurse or doctor immediately if you think you are pregnant.

It is unclear if immunotherapy drugs are excreted in breast milk, so it is really important to tell your nurse or doctor if you are breastfeeding your child.

**Question 14: What support is available to me?**

**Answer:**

Your cancer specialist team will be here to help and support you throughout your treatment. This includes access to social workers, dieticians and assistance to travel to the hospital if needed. There are other organisations which are here to help and support you such as the Irish Cancer Society, Marie Keating Foundation and Arc House. These organisations offer a wide range of services for those people living with cancer.

We are here to support you at all times, so please just ask and we can direct you to the services to support you along your cancer journey.

Video ends.