

Immunotherapy to treat cancer



To fight cancer, you'll undergo immunotherapy treatments. This health sheet explains what they are, how to prepare for them, and what to watch for when you return home.

What is the immune system?

It's made up of organs, cells, and substances produced by the body. It fights viruses, bacteria, cancer cells, etc.

How does immunotherapy work?

There are cases where the immune system doesn't find certain cancer cells. Immunotherapy strengthens the immune system and helps it find and destroy cancer cells.

How is this treatment taken?

It's injected into the veins (intravenously).

The duration of treatment varies from person to person. Ask your care team for more details so that you can plan your schedule.



What do I need to do BEFORE the treatment?

- A few days before your treatment, or at your first treatment, you'll see a pharmacist.
 - You'll give them a list of the medications and natural health products you're taking.
 - They'll give you documents about your immunotherapy medications.
 - They'll inform you about the main side effects and the medications you'll need to take at home.
- You'll have a blood test a few days before each treatment. Based on the results, your care team will tell you whether treatment can begin or needs to be cancelled. In any case, they'll tell you the procedure to follow.

What should I bring on treatment days?

- A bottle of water
- A cold snack or meal
- Something to pass the time (book, tablet, laptop, etc.)



How is the treatment carried out?

Each session includes the following steps.



On the day of your treatment, have a good breakfast.

AT THE HOSPITAL

Important: Arrive 30 minutes before your scheduled treatment time. This gives the pharmacy time to prepare the products.

- Register at the kiosk with your health insurance (RAMQ) card. Take the ticket with a number issued by the terminal. Then go to the waiting room.



You may have to wait a while. Immunotherapy drugs are not very stable once prepared. They're also very expensive (one dose costs several thousand dollars). So they're prepared only on your arrival. That's why you need to arrive early.

- **Important!** In the waiting room, take a clipboard, pencil, and symptom assessment sheet from one of the pigeonholes on the wall. Fill in the sheet. It helps you describe any side effects you may have had since the last treatment: diarrhea, itching, redness, extreme fatigue, etc. With this, the nurse will be able to help you manage your symptoms better.
- When your ticket number appears on the screens on the wall, go to the location indicated (e.g., treatment room, chair 1).

IN THE TREATMENT ROOM

Go to the nurses' station. One of them will tell you where to sit and will explain how the treatment will be done. Give them the completed symptom assessment sheet.

THE TREATMENT

- The nurse tells you the name of each medication you'll receive. You may receive several during the same session. Then, the nurse injects you with the medications. Usually, this doesn't cause any unpleasant sensations.

As a safety precaution, the nurse asks for your name each time she injects you with a medication.

- During the treatment, you can't:
 - leave the oncology centre
 - talk on cell phones in the treatment rooms
 - smoke

Volunteers drop by to offer drinks and chat with you if you wish.



Who can accompany me during my treatments?

A loved one can come with you. However, for safety reasons, pregnant women and children 12 years of age and younger cannot enter the treatment rooms.

What are the possible side effects?

It can happen that your immune system may overreact to immunotherapy. This can increase inflammation (swelling) in certain organs and glands. Usually, side effects appear in the weeks or months after the start of treatments. But they can also appear a few days after the first treatment or up to a year after the last treatment.

See the possible side effects for each organ and what you need to do in the appendix on page 4.

A sticker saying that you're undergoing immunotherapy treatment will be stuck on your oncology passport. Show your passport to any healthcare professional you see.

Can I have children or breastfeed during treatment

Immunotherapy taken by a man or a woman can be dangerous for the fetus in the event of pregnancy. If you're of an age that you could have children, use reliable contraception.



Use it for the duration of your treatment and for another 5 months after the last dose. If you have any concerns or questions about this, talk to your doctor.

You should not breastfeed for the duration of treatment.



Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Feel free to speak with a member of your care team. Outside of business hours, you can call the **CHUM Patient Health Line**.



CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

514 890-8086

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.



RESSOURCES UTILES

Canadian Cancer Society:

cancer.ca

1 888 939-3333

Institut national du cancer (French only):

e-cancer.fr

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

This sheet was adapted from a document from the CISSS Montérégie-Centre.

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal **chumontreal.qc.ca**

APPENDIX: SIDE EFFECTS

Here are the main possible side effects for each organ.

You might have some or none. Most are mild to moderate. They may be reversible if they are detected and treated quickly.

- For all side effects marked with a dot, go to the emergency room with your oncology passport.
- For all other side effects, call your nurse navigator, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Phone:

Outside of these hours, call the **CHUM Patient Health Line** (see page 3).

SKIN

- Blisters or peeling skin
- Itching (urge to scratch)
- Redness or bumps (rash); if the rashes cover a large area of the body, go to the emergency room
- Dry skin

STOMACH/INTESTINE

- 4 liquid stools in 24 hours
- Blood or mucus in the stool
- Constipation
- Stomach pain or cramps
- Weight loss
- Nausea or vomiting

LUNGS

- More severe or more frequent coughing
- Difficult, noisy, or painful breathing

KIDNEYS

- Less urine than usual
- Blood in the urine
- Swollen ankles

LIVER

- Whites of the eyes that turn yellow
- New bleeding or more frequent bruising
- Yellowing skin
- Darker urine
- Loss of appetite

LIMBS (ARMS AND LEGS)

- New weakness in both arms or legs
- Less sensitive hands or feet, preventing you from doing your daily activities
- Muscle or joint pain
- Numbness or prickling of the limbs

THYROID GLAND AND OTHER GLANDS

- New confusion
- More frequent or stronger headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Fatigue or weakness; if you're very tired or exhausted, go to the emergency room
- Dizziness or loss of consciousness
- Changes in mood or behaviour
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Fever

EYES

- Eye pain or redness
- Blurred or double vision
- Other vision disorder

Legende

- Go to the emergency room
- Call your nurse navigator or the **CHUM Patient Health Line**

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