

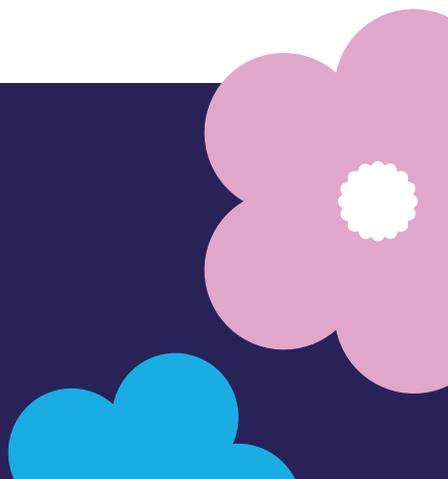
Immunotherapy



MESOTHELIOMA UK

www.mesothelioma.uk.com

0800 169 2409



Introduction

There are various treatments for mesothelioma. Some aim to actively control the cancer whereas others focus on managing the symptoms (known as supportive care).

Treatments to control the cancer can include:

- surgery
- radiotherapy
- chemotherapy
- immunotherapy
- targeted therapy

You may have just one of these types of treatments or a combination of them.

Drug treatments such as chemotherapy and immunotherapy are sometimes called Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy

(SACT). It is called systemic because the treatments are carried in the bloodstream to wherever the cancer cells are in the body. This booklet focuses on immunotherapy.

Immunotherapy is a type of treatment that helps the body's own immune system fight diseases such as cancer.

It is now a standard treatment for some cancers such as lung and melanoma.

Research increasingly shows it could also benefit some people with mesothelioma.

How does it work?

Cancer cells can hide from, or 'switch off' nearby immune system cells. This can stop the immune

system from finding and attacking the cancer cells.

Immunotherapy helps the immune system fight cancer. There are different types of immunotherapy treatments. These work in different ways.

Some “mark” the cancer cells making it possible for the immune system to find and destroy them. Other forms work to boost the immune system to work more effectively against cancer.

What are the benefits of immunotherapy?

Benefits of immunotherapy include:

- Using the body’s own immune system to fight cancer.
- Targets only cancer cells, compared to chemotherapy that can

damage both healthy and cancerous cells.

- Side effects are usually few and mild, and more manageable compared to other anti-cancer therapies.

How do I access it?

Standard NHS access is variable at present. Factors include your general health, where you live, the type of mesothelioma you have, and whether you have already had treatment.

When treatments are not available as standard on the NHS, there may be other ways to access them for example via clinical trials.

If you have any questions about accessing immunotherapy, speak to your healthcare team or

call our support line 0800 169 2409.

Is immunotherapy right for me?

Not everybody can have immunotherapy, and you will only be offered it after careful consideration by your healthcare team.

Make sure your doctor knows if you have previously had/ or have any of the following:

- Autoimmune disorders – such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).
- Pneumonia or an inflammatory lung condition.
- Problems with your kidneys, liver, thyroid, bowels, skin or eyes.

You must also tell your

doctor if you:

- Have previously received immunotherapy treatment.
- Are taking any steroid medications such as prednisolone or dexamethasone, or inhalers containing steroids for any condition.

It is also important to tell your doctor about any other medicines you are taking, have recently taken, or might take in the future.

It could be that immunotherapy is not suitable for you, or you may be at increased risk from side effects. The opinion of another specialist may need to be sought.

How is immunotherapy given?

Immunotherapy drugs are given directly into a vein (intravenously).

How often and how long you receive immunotherapy depends on:

- The immunotherapy drug you are given.
- How your body reacts to the treatment.
- Whether the immunotherapy is working effectively.

How will I know if the immunotherapy is working?

Before each treatment you will have a blood test and a doctor or nurse will assess your health before you continue with the next treatment.

You will also have regular Computerised Tomography (CT) scans to monitor how your mesothelioma is responding to the treatment.

What are the possible side effects?

Immunotherapy sometimes results in the immune system attacking healthy cells. This is an auto immune response and can cause side effects.

The most common side effects include flu like symptoms such as:

- Tiredness
- Joint pain
- Headache
- Itchy skin
- Skin rash

Whilst these are often

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mild, some, such as skin rashes can be an indication of a more serious side effect, so it is always important to tell your healthcare team.

Endocrine disorders can be triggered by the immunotherapy. Examples of endocrine disorders include diabetes as well as problems with the thyroid and adrenal glands. You will be monitored through regular blood tests for these disorders.

Some people experience more serious side effects. Alert your healthcare team immediately if you experience:

- Changes with your breathing or cough.
- Frequent diarrhoea with any signs of blood or mucus.
- Abdominal pain.

Depending on how severe your side effects are, your doctor may pause your treatment or prescribe a type of steroid medication. If side effects worsen or do not improve, you will probably have a longer break in treatment or even need to stop immunotherapy.

There are a number of other potential side effects. These vary according to the immunotherapy drugs you are given. Your healthcare team will give you specific information.

You will have a 24 hour telephone number to call for advice and support if you feel unwell. Let your team know about any concerns you have, even if they have not been mentioned to you or are not listed in the

information you have been given.

Emotions

Having immunotherapy can provoke feelings of stress and anxiety. Talking can be really helpful. For many, talking to friends and family is enough, but for others, talking to a professional is easier and feels safer. Professionals include doctors, nurses, counsellors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, or

people who provide complementary therapies such as massage, reflexology or relaxation.

You can also ask your nurse or your cancer information centre if there are any local support groups. Support groups provide guidance and information and are a place where you can meet other people with mesothelioma who may understand how you are feeling.

Mesothelioma UK

Mesothelioma UK is a charity for anyone affected by mesothelioma.

You can talk to our team, including our Clinical Nurse Specialists. They will be able to give you additional information and support, as well as signpost you to further resources.

Call **freephone 0800 169 2409**
or email **support@mesothelioma.uk.com**

Mesothelioma UK

provides specialist, impartial, up to date support and information.



To sponsor or donate contact: Mesothelioma UK

CIO Registered Charity Number 1177039

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Website | www.mesothelioma.uk.com

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