

Managing Immunotherapy Side Effects

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Presenter Disclosure Information

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The following relationships exist related to this presentation:

Bristol-Myers Squibb, Honorarium, Consultant

Merck, Honorarium, Consultant

Amgen, Honorarium, Consultant

Immunotherapy Side Effects

A 75-year-old man with advanced lung cancer is about to begin immunotherapy. He says he “knows all about the side effects of chemotherapy” after watching his wife go through breast cancer treatment 5 years ago.

He tells his physician: “Don’t worry doc, I’m prepared for all that vomiting and diarrhea. I won’t bother you about it over the weekend, though. I’ve got Kaopectate at home – that always works for me.”

What should we tell him?

Immunotherapy Side Effects

- A. Side effects from immunotherapy are very different from those his wife experienced, both in terms of what to expect and how they are treated.
- B. It is crucial to keep in close touch with his health care team to report symptoms such as vomiting or diarrhea right away.
- C. Immunotherapy side effects can affect any part of the body, so better to err on the side of caution and report all symptoms.
- D. All of the above

Immunotherapy Side Effects

- Immunotherapy activates the immune system...
 - Against cancer → destruction of tumors
 - Against a normal part of the body → side effect
- Can affect any part of the body
- Early treatment = better outcomes, so keeping in close touch with the health care team is crucial
- Side effects can occur even after therapy has ended

Immunotherapy Side Effects

- Different than side effects from traditional chemotherapy
 - What to expect
 - How side effects are treated

	Chemotherapy	Immunotherapy
Headache	Ibuprofen, time	Pituitary MRI, hydrocortisone
Low blood counts	Blood cell growth drugs, decrease next chemo dose	Investigate possible immune destruction of blood cells

- Standard treatment for immunotherapy side effects: **corticosteroids** (prednisone, dexamethasone, etc.)

How common are serious immunotherapy side effects?

Drug(s)	% of patients
Nivolumab (Opdivo) or pembrolizumab (Keytruda)	10-15%
Ipilimumab (Yervoy)	20-25%
Combination ipilimumab + nivolumab	approx. 50%

Do side effects mean the drug is working?

- Some studies suggest that patients who experience side effects are more likely to see tumors shrink
- Lack of side effects does not mean the drug is not working

How soon after starting immunotherapy should I expect side effects

- Anytime
- Some side effects typically occur early (rash) and others later (thyroid)



Do my symptoms represent an immunotherapy side effect?

- The 24-hour rule
- The “different than baseline” rule

Will steroids make the immunotherapy stop working against my cancer?

- Studies suggest that immune suppression (steroids, etc.) for side effects does not prevent the immunotherapy from working against cancer

My side effects are much better.
I'm anxious to restart therapy.
My doctor is not.

- Nivolumab sticks to its target for at least 90 days after a single dose.
- Immunotherapy drugs activate the immune system, which can continue to fight cancer even after the drug has been stopped. (immune memory)



Can I do anything to prevent side effects?

- Limit alcohol intake, avoid the week-old potato salad
 - Confusing to the health care team
 - The one-two punch...
- Report symptoms right away

Lessons and Take-Home Messages

- Immunotherapy side effects can affect any part of the body
 - Even if it's minor, don't assume it's not related to the drug...
- Side effects can occur even after therapy has ended
- Keeping in close touch with the health care team is crucial. We want to hear from you!

For more information, visit
www.HopkinsMelanoma.org

