

Nivolumab

Opdivo®

Immunotherapy treatment



Understanding your treatment

What is immunotherapy?

The immune system defends and protects the body from infection and disease. Some cancer cells successfully hide from the immune system in order to avoid destruction. Immunotherapy is a treatment against cancer that uses drugs that strengthen or restore the immune system's ability to fight cancer cells.

How can immunotherapy help you?

Depending on your type of cancer and the stage of the disease, immunotherapy can be used to :

- **Destroy** cancer cells
- **Stop** the cancer from spreading
- **Slow** the growth of cancer cells

How will you feel while on immunotherapy?

Immunotherapy is used to stimulate your immune system in order to prevent growth of cancer cells and promote their destruction. Even if the treatment affects your own immune system, side effects may arise.

Not everyone has side effects and each person's experience may differ. Side effects and their severity are not representative of immunotherapy's effectiveness or lack thereof.

This document is about the most frequent side effects caused by your immunotherapy.



How will you receive your treatment?

Medication	Administration
Nivolumab	Intravenous infusion over 30 minutes

Cycle is repeated every 2 or 4 weeks



A **blood test** will be done prior to every treatment cycle. Depending on the results and side effects of the previous treatment, the treatment might be delayed.

How can this treatment affect your daily life?

Fatigue and appetite



- You may experience **fatigue** during your treatments. This is usually temporary and may be related to different reasons (medication, stress, the disease). Maintain a good level of activity but rest when you feel the need to.
- Your **appetite may diminish**. Eat more often, in smaller quantities.
- Your **sense of taste may be altered**. Enhance foods with fines herbes or lemon juice. Eating fruits and unsweetened candies, chewing non-sugared gums, etc., may mask the metallic taste.
- **Alcohol** in small quantities is allowed and will not affect the efficacy of the treatments.

Sex life and birth control



- You can have an **active sexual** life during your treatments. However, a decrease in your sexual drive may occur during this period. This may also be influenced by different factors (fatigue, stress, etc.).
- It's safe to kiss, to touch, to hold hands, to sleep in the same bed and to cuddle.
- The effect of the drug on male or female **fertility** is unknown. This medication may have an effect on the menstrual cycle as well as spermatozoid production. However, this does not prevent erection or sexual activity and as such, you can have an active sexual life during your treatments. Pregnancy is possible and this medication could be harmful to the fetus. The use of an effective method of contraception is highly recommended for both men and women while on treatment and up to 5 months after the end of treatment. Breast-feeding is contraindicated during treatment.



Tips and precautions



- **Over the counter medicines, natural health products and vaccines**

Consult your healthcare team:

- if you intend to take any other medication (with or without a prescription) or natural health products.
- if you need to receive a vaccine.

This could decrease your treatment's efficacy or increase its side effects.

- **Always have on hand the complete list of your medications**

Be sure to always have on hand the complete list of your medications, dietary supplements, vitamins and other natural health products. Give it to your doctor and your pharmacist. It is important to make them aware of any change.

- **Notify professionals who take care of your health**

Since immunotherapy can cause side effects with your immune system in any part of your body, you may need urgent treatment such as steroids (cortisone) to treat these side effects. It is important to notify every professional involved with your healthcare (doctor, nurse, pharmacist, etc.) that you are currently receiving or have received immunotherapy.

You will find a medical alert card **at the end of this information sheet**. Cut it, fold it, carry it on you and show it to all of your healthcare professionals while on treatment and up to several months after the end of the treatment.



What are the side effects of your treatment?

This fact sheet aims to let you know the side effects most commonly seen following the administration of your treatment. Please note that when you take any medication, there is a possibility that it causes rare side effects and it is difficult to predict which patients will be affected.

WARNING

Immunotherapy is used to stimulate your immune system to stop the abnormal cells from growing and to destroy them. Even if it acts on your own immune system, side effects can occur. Because your immune system works harder, it could attack normal cells in your body.

You can have **side effects in any part of your body** (your intestines, your liver, your kidneys, your skin, your lungs, your glands or other organs).

These effects **may be mild** or may rarely become **serious** and **life threatening**.

They can occur **during treatment** or even **weeks** or **months** after the treatment has ended.

It is very important to contact a member of your **healthcare team** if you have **any new symptoms** that appear while you are receiving immunotherapy or in the months following the end of the treatment.

It is very important to go to the emergency room as quickly as possible if you have a **serious side effect** while receiving immunotherapy or in the months following the end of the treatment.

During your intravenous treatment and for the following days

ADVERSE EFFECTS

MANAGEMENT

Nausea

Rarely, slight nausea may occur the same day or the day following your treatment.

- Contact a member of your healthcare team if you have nausea that bothers you.



In the weeks following your intravenous treatment

ADVERSE EFFECTS

MANAGEMENT

Skin rash

A skin rash may occur sometime after starting your treatment and may be associated with itchiness.

Your skin may become dryer. Redness and itchiness may develop.

Your skin may become more sensitive to the sun.

- Apply a fragrance-free moisturizing cream as needed.
- Avoid exposure to the sun.
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF of 30 or more).
- Wear a hat.
- If these symptoms occur and bother you, consult a member of your healthcare team who will suggest appropriate measures.
-  If these **symptoms are severe or extended**, either associated with **blisters** or if your **skin is peeling**, contact a member of your healthcare team immediately or go to Emergency Room.

Diarrhea

You may sometimes experience diarrhea, which may start days to weeks after the start of treatment.

- Drink lots of liquids (8 to 10 glasses a day) unless otherwise instructed by your doctor.
- Contact a member of your healthcare team if you have significant diarrhea (more than 3 loose stools per day) for more than 24 hours.
- If you have with diarrhea with fever, contact a member of your health care team immediately or go to the Emergency Room.
-  If you have severe diarrhea (more than 6 loose stools per day) with **abdominal pain and mucus or blood in your stools**, contact a member of your healthcare team immediately or go to Emergency Room.

Inflammation of certain body glands

Inflammation of certain body glands (thyroid, adrenal, pituitary, pancreas) may occur and could cause insufficient hormone production.

- **Be alert to the following symptoms:** fatigue or muscle weakness, persistent and unusual headaches, dizziness or loss of consciousness, modifications in behavior, abdominal pain or lower blood pressure.
- If these symptoms occur, contact a member of your healthcare team immediately.

Weakness or muscle pain

You may feel weakness or muscle pain during your treatments.

Joint stiffness, swelling or joint pain are also possible.

- Notify a member of your healthcare team before your next treatment if these symptoms occur and affect your daily activities. Some measures can be recommended.



Hair loss

Usually there is **no hair loss** with this treatment.

RARE ADVERSE EFFECTS THAT CAN BE SEVERE OR SERIOUS

If the following side effects occur, call your healthcare team as quickly as possible or go to the Emergency Room:

- Cough and/or persistent fever
- Sudden difficulty breathing

PHARMACIST : _____

PHONE : _____

FROM ___ H___ TO ___ H___ (MONDAY TO FRIDAY)

This fact sheet has been prepared by a sub-committee of the Comité national de l'évolution de la pratique des soins pharmaceutiques of the Programme québécois de cancérologie of the Ministry of Health and Social Services in consultation with the Comité de l'évolution de la pratique en oncologie of the Institut national d'excellence en santé et en services sociaux.

DEVELOPED JUNE 2017 | REVISED JUNE 2020





Always keep this card on you

Show it to all healthcare professionals
taking care of you

**IMMEDIATELY CONTACT A MEMBER OF YOUR HEALTHCARE
TEAM OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM IF YOU HAVE ONE
OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNS:**

- Diarrhea: more than 6 loose stools per day, with mucus or blood and abdominal pain
- Cough or persistent fever
- Sudden difficulty breathing
- Redness or itchiness on more than a third (30%) of your body
- Any other unusual or new health problem

**WARNING: THIS PATIENT IS CURRENTLY ON
IMMUNOTHERAPY**

(name of medication)

**Risk of rare immune-mediated adverse reactions that can be
severe and need rapid management, ex.:**

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| - Colitis | - Nephritis | - Encephalopathies |
| - Pneumonitis | - Rheumatic symptoms | - Uveitis |
| - Dermatitis | - Endocrinopathies | - Pancreatitis |
| - Hepatitis | - Neuropathies | - Others |

More information at:

<https://www.geoq.info/fr/pub/immunotherapie/lignes-directrices>