

Immunotherapy for Cancer: Monoclonal Antibodies (mAbs)



Immunotherapy is a way of treating disease using the body's immune system. This therapy is used in treating some cancers. One type of therapy is called monoclonal antibodies (mAbs). This therapy is most often used along with other cancer treatments. This sheet tells you more about mAbs and what to expect if they are part of your treatment plan.

How monoclonal antibodies work

Cancer cells are cells that have changed and become abnormal. Sometimes these cells make large amounts of certain proteins on their cell surface. mAbs can be made in a lab to recognize these certain proteins. Once they recognize them, mAbs can attach themselves to the cancer cells. The mAbs may kill the cancer cell by itself. Or they may get help from the body's immune system.

Some mAbs carry specialized chemotherapy, toxins, or radiation directly to the cancer cells. Other mAbs are made of 2 different mAbs. This lets them attach to 2 different proteins at the same time. These are called bispecific mAbs. Once the cancer cells have been killed, mAbs can be used to prevent them from coming back.

Possible side effects of monoclonal antibodies

mAbs can cause side effects. These side effects are most likely to occur at the time of treatment. Common side effects include:

- Allergic reaction, such as rash, hives, or problems breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- Skin rash
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Low blood pressure
- High blood pressure
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea

Other side effects depend on the type of mAb being used. Your healthcare provider can tell you more about what side effects to expect and how to manage them.

How monoclonal antibodies are given

mAbs are given through a small tube called an IV (intravenous) catheter that is put into a vein. It can be a vein in the arm or a larger vein in the body. This allows the mAbs to be delivered directly into the bloodstream. The treatment may be done at a hospital, clinic, or healthcare provider's office. Each treatment may take as little as 30 minutes. Or it can take many hours depending on the type of mAb. How often the treatment is needed and

how long the treatment is given also varies. It depends on the type of cancer you have and the type of mAb being given.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4 °F (38 °C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Rash or hives
- Ongoing fatigue
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Headache that gets worse
- Uncontrolled nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea that doesn't get better over time
- Any new symptom, or one that causes concern

Call 911

Call **911** right away if you have:

- Chest pain
- Trouble breathing
- Wheezing
- Swollen lips, tongue, or throat

Monitoring your progress

During your treatment, you'll have routine visits with your healthcare provider. At these visits, your healthcare provider checks your health and response to the treatment. After treatment ends, you and your provider will talk about your treatment results. You'll also talk about whether you need more cancer treatments.

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