

Nonmelanoma Skin Cancer: Targeted Therapy



If you've been diagnosed with nonmelanoma skin cancer, you may have a lot of questions about treatment. One option to think about is targeted therapy.

What is targeted therapy?

Targeted therapy uses medicines to target certain proteins that help cancer cells grow and spread. The medicine doesn't harm normal cells. This is different from chemotherapy. Chemo can kill cancer cells and healthy cells.

When is targeted therapy used for nonmelanoma skin cancer?

Not every person with nonmelanoma skin cancer will need targeted therapy. You and your cancer care provider can talk about if targeted therapy is a choice for you. It will depend on:

- The type of your nonmelanoma skin cancer
- The stage of your cancer
- Details about your cancer cells, such as proteins on the surface of the cancer cells or gene changes in the cells. Cancer cells are tested for these in a lab.
- Your age and overall health
- Your concerns about side effects
- What treatments you may have had before

Targeted therapy may be used in these cases:

- The nonmelanoma skin cancer is advanced
- The skin cancer has come back
- The skin cancer can't be treated with other options such as surgery or radiation

How is targeted therapy given for nonmelanoma skin cancer?

There are different types of targeted therapy medicines. For example:

- If you have squamous cell skin cancer, you may receive a medicine called an EGFR inhibitor. An example of this is cetuximab.
- If you have basal cell skin cancer, you may receive a medicine called a hedgehog pathway inhibitor. These include vismodegib and sonidegib.

How you get targeted therapy depends on which medicines are used. Some are pills that you take at home. Others go right into your blood through an IV (intravenous) line in a vein. This may take several minutes or hours. In most cases, you will have targeted therapy as an outpatient. This means that you get it at a hospital clinic, infusion center, or your healthcare provider's office. You go home the same day.

What are common side effects of targeted therapy?

You might have some side effects during targeted therapy. These can be different for each person. Some common side effects are:

- Skin rash or itchy skin
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Feeling tired
- Nausea or vomiting
- Changes in taste and appetite
- Weight changes
- Mouth sores

Talk with your healthcare team about any side effects to watch for and when to report them. They can help you manage them so you're more comfortable.

Some types of targeted therapy medicines should not be used in people who are or could become pregnant. This is because they could harm the baby in the womb. Talk with your healthcare provider about birth control.

Research and clinical trials

Researchers are working to improve targeted treatments. You can ask your cancer care provider about clinical trials. A clinical trial is a research study to test new treatments. You may have access to a new treatment when you join a study.

Working with your team

Being an active part of your treatment can help you better handle the challenges of treatment and recovery. Stay informed, ask questions, and work with your healthcare team. This will help make sure you get the best care for your needs.

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