

# Targeted Therapy for Cancer

Targeted therapy is treatment that uses precision medicines to find and attack certain changes found in or on cancer cells. There are many kinds of targeted therapies, and each works in a specific way. For certain cancers, testing can be done to see if any targeted therapies might be available. If so, targeted therapy might be used on its own or along with other types of treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or surgery. Not everyone who has cancer will get targeted therapy.



## How does targeted therapy work?

Targeted therapy finds and attacks specific changes found only in cancer cells and leaves normal, healthy cells alone. This makes it different from standard chemotherapy (chemo). Different targeted therapies work to:

- Block or turn off chemical signals that tell a cancer cell to grow and divide
- Change proteins within the cancer cells so the cells die
- Stop the formation of new blood vessels that feed cancer cells
- Help your immune system to kill the cancer cells
- Carry toxins to the cancer cells to kill them



## How is it given, and how long does treatment last?

There are many ways people get targeted therapies. They can be given at a clinic or hospital as infusions through an IV catheter that is put into a vein, or as a shot or injection into the skin. Other types can be given at home by taking a pill.

Some targeted therapy is given at regular intervals called cycles. A cycle may be a dose of targeted therapy (sometimes with other treatments) on 1 or more days, followed by several days or weeks without treatment. You may also take it every day with no rest breaks, or 1 or more days a week or month.

Each targeted therapy is given on a schedule that helps it fight cancer best while causing the fewest side effects. Because each person's treatment is different, how long their treatment lasts can be different, too.



## Getting ready for targeted therapy

If targeted therapy is part of your treatment, talk to your cancer care team about what to expect. This will help you plan for changes in your work or family schedule if needed.



## Side effects of targeted therapy

Because of the way targeted therapy works, its side effects are usually different from other treatments, like chemo. Some targeted therapies have very few side effects, and others can cause more or more serious problems. There are many types of targeted therapy. Side effects of each depend on the drug that's given. Because these medicines can affect different targets, not everyone getting targeted therapy will have the same side effects. Some common side effects include:

- Skin changes like itching, rash, dry skin, being sensitive to light, and changes in skin color
- Changes in hair growth or color
- Allergic or infusion reactions
- High blood pressure
- Bleeding problems
- Blood clots
- Changes in how the heart works
- Swelling in the face, feet, legs, or hands

Other less common side effects can occur, including autoimmune reactions, where the immune system attacks healthy parts of your body. This isn't common, but for some people, it can be life-threatening.

Talk to your doctor about what specific side effects you might have from your treatment and what to do if they occur.



## Questions to ask

• Following are some questions you can ask your doctor and cancer care team:

- What type of targeted therapy will I get?
- How often will I get treatment?
- Will I have rest periods between treatment cycles?
- Where will I go to get targeted therapy? How long will each treatment last?
- Can I drive myself to treatment?
- Will I need to take medicines at home? What should I do if I miss a dose?
- Will I need other types of cancer treatment? If so, what types?
- What side effects could I have?
- How can my side effects be managed, and what can I do about them?
- Will my insurance pay for my treatment? How much will I have to pay?
- Will I be able to work and do my regular activities during treatment?
- Can I take my other medicines or supplements during treatment?
- Are there any special things I need to do to protect myself and others while getting treatment?
- When should I call the doctor or nurse?



To learn more about targeted therapy, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/targetedtherapy](https://cancer.org/targetedtherapy) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

