

Tays / cancer treatment

## **For patients receiving immunotherapy**

### **General**

Immuno-oncological treatments (immunotherapy) enhance your body's immune defences against cancer cells. The drugs used in medication-based treatment of cancer and their combinations and doses are planned individually. Possible adverse effects of medication are caused by the immune system incorrectly targeting defences against healthy organs. Adverse effects can originate from any organ. The side effects are relatively rare and their quality and severity vary. It is important to treat any side effects quickly, so contact the treatment staff without delay if you develop new symptoms.

You will also be contacted before each treatment session primarily through the online cancer treatment outpatient clinic to ask about your condition.

### **Consumption of alcohol, vitamins and natural products**

The consumption of alcohol is not entirely prohibited as long as it is moderate. Ask your doctor if you can take vitamin and trace element products. If you do not eat much or you have a limited diet, taking a multivitamin mineral supplement may be justified. However, according to the Finnish nutrition recommendation, everyone should consume 10 or 20 micrograms of Vitamin D per day, either in the winter or throughout the year depending on age and diet. The use of naturopathic products is not recommended, as there is insufficient information on their effect on the efficacy or safety of treatment.

### **Pregnancy and fertility**

Fertility is not affected by treatments but you must ensure that you do not get pregnant during the treatments. If you are in a fertile age, you should continue to use a reliable method of contraception for at least 2 years after the end of treatment.

### **Laboratory tests**

Laboratory tests are usually checked before each treatment session. You can go to the nearest laboratory for the tests.

### **Implementation of the treatment**

The treatment is usually an internal form of therapy, administered through a cannula inserted in a vein on your hand. The cannula will be removed after the treatment is finished. Patients who are receiving repeated intravenous cancer treatment may get an implanted port if there are continuous issues with putting in the cannula. The port is placed under the clavicle while under local anaesthetic. The port is a small metal device through which a catheter enters the central venous system, allowing repeated and long-term administration of medicines.

During the treatment, you can sit in the treatment chair or lie in the bed. You can also move around, i.e. use the toilet, or drink and eat snacks, during the treatment.

If you experience burning or pain by the cannula during the treatment or you notice a lump, inform the nurse immediately.

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### **Reimbursement of travel expenses**

If necessary, you can get a travel reimbursement certificate for the use of your own car or Kela taxi during your oncology treatment appointment.

### **Protection against secretions after the treatment**

The medicine is excreted with urine but you do not need to take special precautions when using the bathroom.

### **Vaccinations**

A vaccination against flu can be given annually during the treatments. Discuss other vaccines with the treating physician.

### **Medical treatment of cancer at the oncology outpatient clinic**

Most of the medical cancer treatments at Tays are carried out as a daytime appointment at the oncology outpatient clinic, which is open on weekdays. Many cancer medication appointments are carried out as follow-up appointments without a doctor's appointment. However, if need arises during a treatment-related appointment to request a doctor's assessment, the appointment will be charged according to the doctor's fee. Cancer medication is prepared for you at the hospital pharmacy in accordance with the doctor's order, and in order to ensure that the pharmacotherapy appointment goes smoothly, the doctor's appointment and medical treatment are usually arranged on different days.

The doctor prescribes electronic prescriptions for any auxiliary medicinal products related to preventing adverse effects from treatment. The nurse provides instructions on what medicines you must take at home before the treatment and what you can take if you experience any adverse effects from the treatment.

Mention any issues related to certificates and prescriptions during the doctor's appointment. Bring an up-to-date list of at-home medication when you come to the appointment. Your loved ones are always welcome to accompany you to the appointment.

You have the possibility to contact medical care staff online through the online cancer treatment clinic (Noona®) in non-emergency matters. The staff also uses it to contact patients, e.g. for electronic symptom surveys during cancer treatments and, if necessary, for scheduling new laboratory tests. If you do not already have the log-in credentials for the online clinic, you can ask for them during your appointments.

### **Medical treatment of cancer in inpatient wards RS1 and RS2**

Longer-term medical treatment is carried out in the cancer treatment inpatient wards, and with some types of disease immunotherapy is combined with chemotherapy. The inpatient wards are open 24 hours every day of the week.

Auxiliary medicinal products related to the cancer treatment to prevent adverse effects will be given to you in the inpatient ward before the treatment. Upon discharge, you will be prescribed auxiliary medicinal products by your doctor, and the nurse provides instructions on what medicines you must continue taking at home after the treatment and what you can take if you experience any adverse effects from the treatment.

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Please mention any issues related to certificates and prescriptions during the doctor's appointment. Your close ones are always welcome to bring you and pick you up from the inpatient ward and visit during the visiting hours. If you wish to have a treatment meeting with your loved ones involved, this must be agreed separately. Bring an up-to-date list of at-home medication when you come to the ward.

## Adverse effects

Adverse effects are due to your body's increased defences incorrectly targeting its own tissue. They can originate from any organ and even with delay months after the treatments have ended. If you experience any new symptoms, contact the oncology outpatient clinic. Some, but not all, possible organ-specific adverse effects are described below.

### Diarrhoea

Contact your treatment unit if you develop diarrhoea.

- It is important to stay well hydrated if you have diarrhoea. Suitable drinks include diluted juice, berry soup, weak tea and sports drinks (e.g. Dexal<sup>®</sup>, Hartsport<sup>®</sup>, Gatorade<sup>®</sup>). Pharmacies sell powdered drinks for the treatment of diarrhoea (e.g. Osmosal<sup>®</sup>). Eat what you feel like eating often and in small portions.

**Shortness of breath or chest pain** may be caused by a lung reaction or a heart issue. Symptoms may include cough, swelling of legs or fever. If you experience more symptoms than usual, contact the unit responsible for your treatment.

**Different changes in the function of glands that produce hormones** are possible. These are monitored during treatments through blood tests to detect adverse effects. The levels that are checked include blood sugar, thyroid values, and cortisol levels.

**Increased liver values** are possible. They are also monitored during the treatments. If the urine turns dark and stools turn light-coloured, or your skin and eyeballs turn yellow, contact the treatment unit.

There are many possible **skin damage issues**. Mild itching and dry skin are common and you can treat these issues with creams and anti-itching medicines. Cetirizine (e.g. Histec<sup>®</sup>) can be taken for itching if needed. You can get it from the pharmacy without a prescription. If the symptoms are severe, you develop ulcers or blisters, or the skin issues cover a large area, contact the unit responsible for your treatment.

**Infusion reactions during** medicine administration are possible. If you experience shortness of breath or other discomfort during treatment, tell your nurse. If you experience severe symptoms, the treatment is interrupted, but in case of less severe symptoms, their recurrence can often be prevented by pre-medication.

**Feelings of exhaustion and fatigue** may increase during the treatment. Light exercise alleviates fatigue symptoms. Exhaustion and treatments may lower sexual desire.

### Extravasation

Internally administered medicine may sometimes leak outside the vein into the surrounding tissue. This is called extravasation. You may feel this as immediate pain, stinging or discoloration on your skin, which gets better over time. In these cases, immunological

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agents do not cause any later adverse effects or damage to tissues. Therefore, it is best to avoid moving the infusion arm suddenly during treatment and to monitor sensations in the hand and arm during treatment.

**Contact the unit responsible for your treatment or the emergency department without delay if you have**

- temperature over 38°C
- severe shortness of breath or cough
- severe abdominal pains or severe diarrhoea
- extensive rash or other hypersensitivity reaction
- confusion, convulsions
- you are not feeling well before the next treatment
- other new and severe symptoms

**Contact information**

**The phone number for the pharmacotherapy unit of the oncology outpatient clinic is 03 311 63468**

We use a callback service. Follow the instructions and we will call you back. You can also contact the clinic through the online cancer treatment clinic (Noona) in non-emergency cases.

**Contact the inpatient wards if any issues arise on weekends, nights and evenings**

Oncology Ward 1 (RS1), telephone 03 311 63311  
Oncology Ward 2 (RS2), telephone 03 311 63312  
Medical Helpline, tel. 116 117