

# Subcutaneous Immunotherapy for Cancer

## A Guide for Patients and Caregivers



### UNDERSTANDING YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

Options for cancer treatment continue to expand to better support patients. One growing treatment area is subcutaneous (SC) immunotherapy. This is a way of giving cancer medicines through **a small shot under the skin** instead of an IV that goes into a vein. Many patients find SC injections simpler, more comfortable, and less time-consuming. This fact sheet will help you understand what SC immunotherapy is, how it works, what to expect, and how to talk with your healthcare team about whether it's right for you.



**Subcutaneous:**  
“under the skin.”

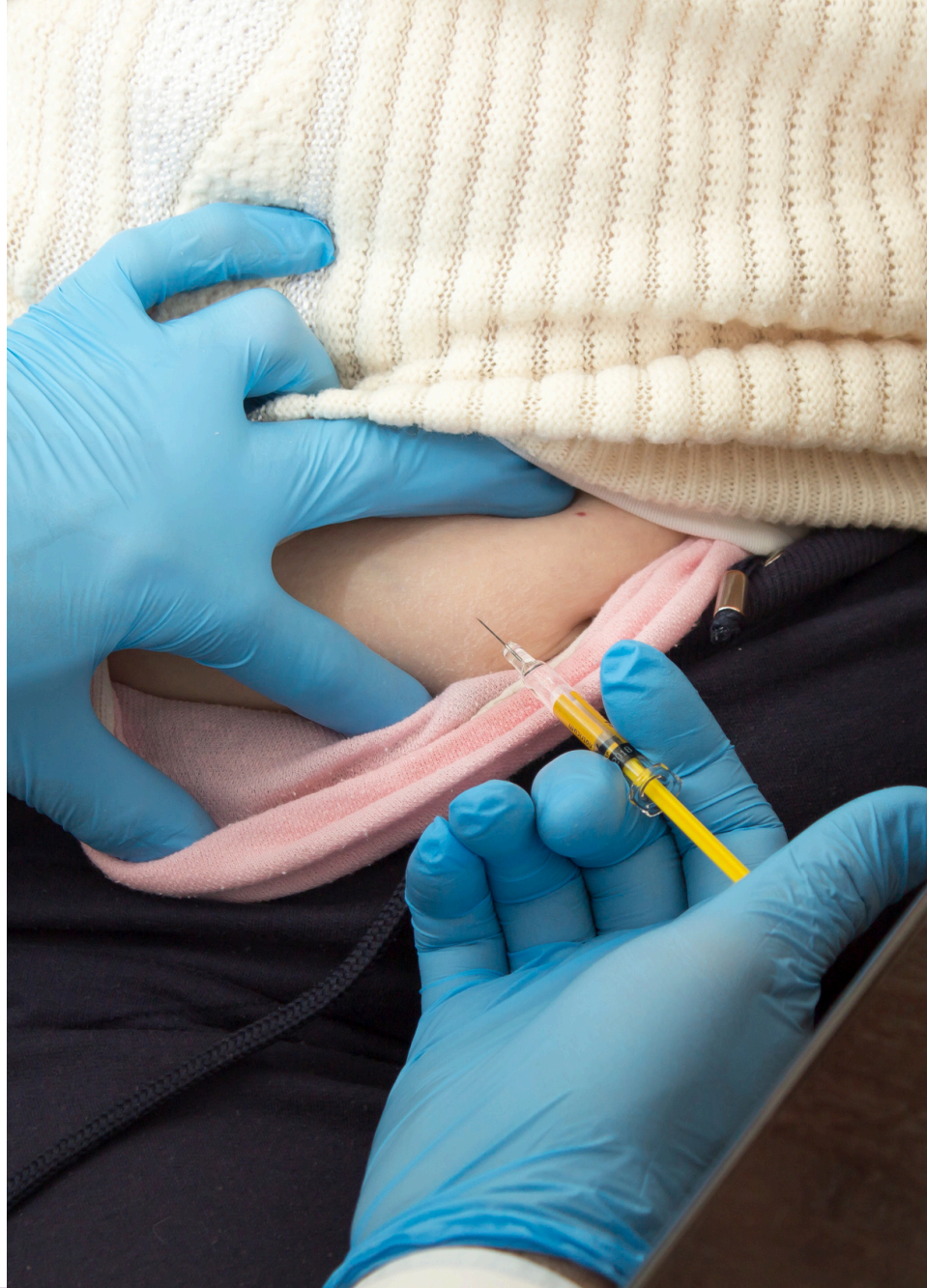


## WHAT IS SUBCUTANEOUS IMMUNOTHERAPY?

Subcutaneous means “under the skin.” With SC immunotherapy, a cancer medicine is injected (like a shot) into the fatty layer beneath your skin. This is usually done in the stomach (abdomen) or thigh. This is different from IV immunotherapy, which is delivered directly into your vein during an infusion.

These injections typically take a few minutes, compared to IV infusions that may take 30 minutes to several hours. SC injections are given by a trained healthcare professional. You will not need to give yourself the injection.

Most SC immunotherapy drugs are the same medicines used for IV immunotherapy — only the delivery method is different.



## HOW DOES IMMUNOTHERAPY WORK?

Immunotherapy helps your immune system recognize and attack cancer cells. Different types of immunotherapy work in different ways, but many — including the SC forms — are called immune checkpoint inhibitors. These medicines help the immune system “see” cancer cells more clearly and destroy them.

Several checkpoint inhibitors are now available in SC form. Researchers are continuing to develop new SC options, so more patients can benefit from this approach.



Learn more about immunotherapy here:  
[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You)



## WHY ARE SC OPTIONS BEING DEVELOPED?

For many years, most immunotherapy treatments had to be given through an IV at a treatment center. IV treatments work well, but they can take a lot of time, require regular clinic visits, and often need an IV line or port (way to insert the IV into your vein).

### SC immunotherapy is another option. It may:



#### Shorten treatment time:

SC injections take a few minutes, whereas IV infusions may take 30–60 minutes or longer.



#### Result in fewer clinic visits and more flexibility:

SC injections can often be given in outpatient clinics or other care sites. Some SC injections may be given at home by a healthcare provider.



#### Cause less emotional and physical stress:

It may feel easier to have quicker visits and fewer reminders of treatment (such as a port). This can support mental well-being and help keep daily routines on track.



#### Limit the need for IV access.

Avoiding an IV means:

- No port or infusion line
- Lower risk of infusion-related reactions
- Less discomfort for many patients



#### Provide similar effectiveness to IV forms:

SC versions contain the same active cancer fighting ingredients, so treatment effectiveness is not reduced.

Your care team can help you understand whether IV or SC administration is best for your specific treatment plan.

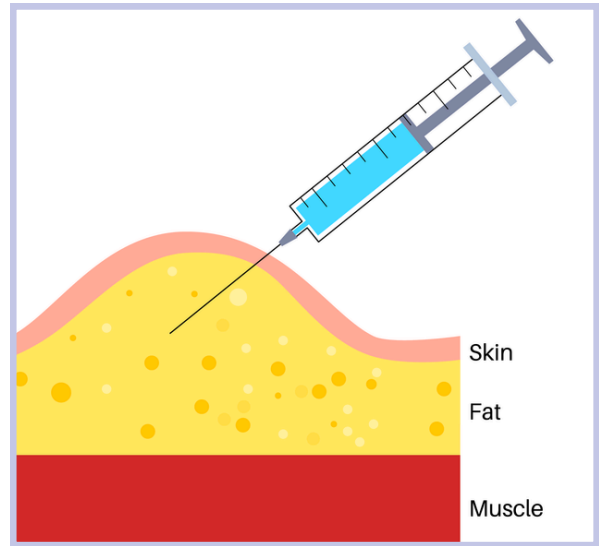


## HOW DOES SC IMMUNOTHERAPY WORK IN THE BODY?

When immunotherapy medicine is injected under your skin, it enters the fatty layer under the surface. This layer has a lot of dendritic cells, important immune cells that help “teach” the immune system to recognize cancer.

Here’s how SC immunotherapy activates your immune system:

- 1** Medicine is absorbed under the skin, where dendritic cells collect it.
- 2** These cells travel to nearby lymph nodes, the training centers of the immune system.
- 3** There, dendritic cells activate T-cells — immune cells that can find and destroy cancer cells throughout your body.



This immune activation process is similar to IV immunotherapy, but SC administration targets a slightly different set of immune cells in the skin.

## WHAT TYPES OF CANCER CAN SC IMMUNOTHERAPY TREAT?

Many cancers now have SC immunotherapy options, including:

- Bladder cancer
- Melanoma
- Lung cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Stomach cancer
- Colorectal cancer
- Liver cancer

Researchers are developing new SC versions of some treatments, which may allow more people to use them in the future.



## WHAT ARE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

SC immunotherapy has many of the same possible side effects as IV immunotherapy because the medicines themselves are the same. For SC immunotherapy, there may also be injection site side effects. Your care team will discuss the symptoms to watch for and when to call them.



Immunotherapy Side Effects	Injection-Site Reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fatigue (extreme tiredness)</li><li>• Rash</li><li>• Diarrhea</li><li>• Inflammation of organs (such as the lungs, liver, or intestines)</li></ul> <p>Checkpoint inhibitors can sometimes activate the immune system too strongly. For example, CRS (cytokine release syndrome) is an immune reaction that can cause fever, low blood pressure, or fatigue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SC delivery of some drugs has shown lower rates of CRS than IV versions.</li></ul>	<p>Because SC immunotherapy is given under the skin, many patients experience reactions at the injection site, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Redness</li><li>• Swelling</li><li>• Itching</li><li>• Mild pain</li></ul> <p>These reactions usually don't last long and can be easily managed. Putting a cold pack on the area can help reduce swelling and discomfort. Over-the-counter pain medicine may also help.</p>

## IS SUBCUTANEOUS IMMUNOTHERAPY RIGHT FOR ME?

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Your doctor will help determine whether an SC immunotherapy option is available and appropriate for your diagnosis and treatment plan. Factors they may consider include:

- The type of cancer you have
- Which immunotherapy medicines are approved for your disease
- Your medical history and overall health
- How you respond to current or past treatments
- Your personal preferences

**Remember:** Choosing an SC format does not mean your IV immunotherapy treatment wasn't working. These options are both effective — they simply give you more choices in how you receive your care.

## WHAT SHOULD I ASK MY CARE TEAM?

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Is there a subcutaneous version of the immunotherapy I'm already receiving?
How long does the injection take?
Where will I receive it?
What side effects should I expect, and how can I manage them?
How will we monitor whether the treatment is working?
What should I do if I notice a reaction at the injection site?
Can SC treatment reduce my time in the clinic?
Are there different delivery options for the immunotherapy you are recommending?



**Bringing these questions to your next appointment can help you make informed decisions.**

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR SC IMMUNOTHERAPY?

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As more medications become available in SC form, patients may have more treatment options that meet their individual needs. Research continues to expand, including development of:

- More immunotherapy medicines that can be delivered as SC injections
- SC combinations with chemotherapy or targeted therapy

These options may further reduce treatment time and increase flexibility for patients and families. Ask your care team if SC immunotherapy could be a good fit for your treatment plan.



# RESOURCES

## IMMUNOTHERAPY RESOURCES

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### **Cancer Support Community**

CSC-867-5309 (or outside the U.S., toll-free 888-793-9355)

[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You)

### **American Cancer Society**

800-227-2345

[www.Cancer.org/Cancer/Managing-Cancer/Treatment-Types/Immunotherapy](http://www.Cancer.org/Cancer/Managing-Cancer/Treatment-Types/Immunotherapy)

### **National Cancer Institute (NCI)**

800-422-6237

[www.Cancer.gov/About-Cancer/Treatment/Types/Immunotherapy](http://www.Cancer.gov/About-Cancer/Treatment/Types/Immunotherapy)

### **NCI Clinical Trial Information**

800-422-6237 | [www.Cancer.gov/ClinicalTrials](http://www.Cancer.gov/ClinicalTrials)

### **Patient Advocate Foundation**

800-532-5274 | [www.PatientAdvocate.org](http://www.PatientAdvocate.org)



## Cancer Support Community Resources

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**Cancer Support Helpline®** — Have questions, concerns, or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline at CSC-867-5309 (or outside the U.S., toll-free 888-793-9355), available in 200 languages.

**Open to Options®** — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling CSC-867-5309 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

**Frankly Speaking About Cancer®** — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

**Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs** — With the help of over 200 locations, in 50 markets, CSC and Gilda's Club centers provide services free of charge to people impacted by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more  
**[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation)**.

**Cancer Experience Registry®** — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at **[www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org)**.

**MyLifeLine®** — CSC's secure, online community welcomes anyone impacted by cancer to easily connect with community to reduce stress, anxiety, and isolation. Create a personal network site and invite friends & family to follow your journey. And participate in our discussion forums any time of day to meet others like you who understand what you are experiencing. Join now at **[www.MyLifeLine.org](http://www.MyLifeLine.org)**.

**Grassroots Network** — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at **[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate)**.

This publication is available to download and print yourself at **[www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You](http://www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Immunotherapy-Cancer-It-Right-You)**.

For print copies of this publication or other information about coping with cancer, visit **[Orders.CancerSupportCommunity.org](http://Orders.CancerSupportCommunity.org)**.

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