### National Comprehensive Cancer Network®

NCCN

# Understanding **Immunotherapy Side Effects**

Immune checkpoint inhibitors (a type of immunotherapy) offer a promising new way to treat certain cancers. But these medicines can cause your immune system to attack normal organs and tissues in your body, affecting the way they work. Serious side effects typically occur in less than 5% of patients, but certain mild side effects can occur in up to 30% - 50% of patients.

Contact your health care provider right away if you think you may be experiencing ...

#### Brain or spinal cord **Pituitary gland** Confusion, changes in Low cortisol causing behavior, headaches, fatigue, loss of appetite, seizures, short-term memory muscle weakness loss, problems speaking or Eves reacting, sensitivity to light, Blurred or distorted vision, neck stiffness. sensorv blind spots, eye pain or problems, pain, fever, nausea redness, itchy or bulging or vomiting eyes, new floaters Muscles Mouth Muscle weakness, aches, Dry mouth, pain or burning, pain, or stiffness sores, changes in taste Heart Thyroid gland Fatigue, chest pain or Weight loss or gain, rapid pressure, irregular heartbeat, heartbeat, fatigue, sweating, shortness of breath, swollen anxiety, constipation, dry legs, ankles, or feet skin, sensitivity to cold Lungs Bowel Shortness of breath, dry Watery stools, cramping, cough, chest pain, fever urgency, stomach-area pain, fever, blood or mucus in stool, nighttime bowel movements Skin Rash, itching, blisters, Joints psoriasis, reddish-purple Joint pain or swelling, bumps and patches stiffness after rest,

improvement with activity

For other signs and symptoms that

Checkpoint Inhibitors.

may occur with immunotherapy, please

see the NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Immunotherapy Side Effects – Immune

Nerves

Numbness or tingling in hands or feet: unusual weakness in legs, arms, or face

## What is immunotherapy?

- Immune checkpoint inhibitors are designed to work with your immune system to treat certain types of cancer.
  - Immunotherapy works differently than traditional chemotherapy and can cause different kinds of side effects.
- It is important to be aware of possible side effects and contact your health care professional right away if you experience any problems.



## Ask your care team for an immunotherapy wallet card

This card lists your immunotherapy regimen, potential side effects, and contact numbers for your cancer care team.

A printable card is available from the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) website.

### Did you know?

- No matter where your cancer began, side effects from immunotherapy can affect your whole body.
- Side effects may appear shortly after beginning treatment, within the first couple of months, or even after you finish treatment.
- Because many of these side effects can occur from other causes that would be treated differently, make sure your doctor knows you are or were on immunotherapy.
- You may be more likely to experience side effects if you are taking more than one kind of immunotherapy or immunotherapy combined with other types of cancer medicines.
- Many of these immune side effects are treatable. Your doctor may prescribe corticosteroids or other medications to help manage any problems.
- Rare but serious side effects can lead to death, especially if left untreated.

This information does not replace the expertise and clinical judgment of the clinician. If you think you are experiencing these symptoms, contact your health care provider today.

> NCCN Guidelines for Patients<sup>®</sup> Immunotherapy Side Effects series Available at NCCN.org/patientguidelines

