

BMDA Treating Bladder Cancer: Intravesical Therapy

Some types of bladder tumors are hard to remove completely with surgery. They may happen in more than one area and they may be flat against the bladder wall. They may have come back after treatment. Or, the bladder tumors may have been very small and removed during a transurethral resection of bladder tumor (TURBT), but there's concern they may come back. In these cases, special medicines that kill cancer cells may be put right inside the bladder. This is called intravesical therapy. It may be a choice if you have a hard-to-remove tumor. Or it may be done after surgery to help keep the cancer from coming back.

Medicine inside your bladder

Intravesical therapy is often done in a healthcare provider's office or outpatient clinic. A thin, flexible tube (catheter) is passed through the urethra and into the bladder. The catheter is used to fill the bladder with a liquid medicine. This may be a liquid chemotherapy medicine such as Gemcitabine or Docetaxel. Or it may be BCG (Bacillus of Calmette and Guerin). This is a type of bacteria that helps boost your body's immune system so that it kills the cancer cells.

During treatment

You will need to hold the medicine in your bladder for 2 hours. In some cases, the catheter may be left in and the medicine is removed through it when treatment is done. In other cases, the catheter is taken out after the medicine is put in. Then you will urinate after the 2 hours are over. If BCG is used, you may need to pour bleach in the toilet after you urinate. This kills any bacteria that may be left over. Intravesical therapy is given weekly for 6 to 8 weeks for the initial induction course. During this time, you may be given antibiotics. This is to help prevent infection. It will depend on the medicine that is used for you.

After treatment

After your initial BCG treatment, you may need to have follow-up treatments for up to a year or more. This is called maintenance BCG. These help keep the cancer from coming back. When all the treatments are done, you may have tests done every few months (such as a cystoscopy) to help check for cancer cells.

Risks and possible complications

The following are possible side effects of this treatment:

- Bladder infection
- Blood in the urine
- Bladder irritation (burning, need to urinate often, pain on urination)

- Flu-like symptoms, such as fever and chills
- Scarring of the bladder (rare)
- General infection (with BCG) (very rare)

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you develop a fever of 101.4 degrees F (38 degrees C) or higher. Be sure you know what other problems you should watch for, and know how to get help any time, including after office hours, on weekends, and on holidays.

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Treatment

Some treatments are standard – the currently used treatment – and some are being tested in clinical trials. Before starting treatment, patients may want to think about taking part in a clinical trial.

A clinical trial is a research study meant to help improve current treatments or obtain information on new treatments. When clinical trials show that a new treatment is better than the standard treatment, the new treatment may become the standard treatment.

Ask your doctor if a clinical trial is available for your type of cancer.

Five Types of Standard Treatment

Surgery

Which type of surgery is chosen depends on the type of bladder cancer. Superficial cancer may be treated by removing only the tumor. If surgery to remove the bladder is your best treatment option, your doctor will discuss the procedure with you. In some cases, patients receive chemotherapy before or after surgery to kill any cancer cells. Treatment given after surgery, to increase the chances of a cure, is called adjuvant therapy. Treatment given prior to surgery is called neoadjuvant. Intravesical therapy maybe recommended when only the superficial tumor is removed.

Radiation Treatment

Radiation treatment uses high-energy X-rays or other types of radiation to kill cancer cells or keep them from growing. There are two types of radiation. External radiation therapy uses a machine outside the body to send radiation toward the cancer. Internal radiation therapy uses a radioactive substance that is placed directly into or near the cancer. The type of the radiation given depends on the type and stage of the cancer.

Patient Education

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a cancer treatment that uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells. It kills the cancer cells or stops them from growing. Chemotherapy is often used to treat bladder cancer that has spread to other parts of the body (called metastasis) such as the lymph nodes.

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy (sometimes called biologic therapy) is a treatment that uses the patient's immune system to fight cancer. Substances made by the body or made in a laboratory are used to boost, direct or restore the body's natural defenses against cancer.

Intravesical therapy

In these cases, special medicines that kill cancer cells may be put right inside the bladder. This is called intravesical therapy. It may be a choice if you have a hard-to-remove tumor. Or it may be done after surgery to help keep the cancer from coming back.

Bladder Cancer

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