

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IMMUNE-RELATED ADVERSE EVENTS

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What Are Immune-Related Adverse Events?

Immunotherapy involving the use of immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs) stimulates the immune system to combat cancer cells. However, this heightened immune response may inadvertently lead to immune-related adverse events (irAEs). These occur when the immune system attacks healthy tissues and organs, resulting in side effects that can range from mild to severe.



What Are Some of the Symptoms of irAEs?

Clinical manifestation of irAEs varies widely as it is determined by the part of the body affected by the ICI-mediated damage. Some common symptoms can include:

- Skin-related symptoms (dermatitis, rash, itching)
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhea, colitis)
- Respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath)
- Endocrine symptoms (fatigue, weight changes, temperature sensitivity)
- Neurologic symptoms (headaches, vision changes, weakness)
- Musculoskeletal symptoms (joint pain, muscle weakness)

What Are Risk Factors for irAEs?

Certain factors may increase your risk for irAEs, including:

- Preexisting conditions: Patients with autoimmune diseases may be at higher risk.
- Treatment type: The specific immunotherapy you receive can influence the likelihood of irAEs.
- Individual response: Responses to immunotherapy vary, and some people may be more prone to irAEs than others.

How Are irAEs Diagnosed?

- Regular monitoring: Your doctor will ask you questions about your medical history and your symptoms. They will also do a physical examination. Routine checkups and open communication with your health care team are vital for early detection.
- Diagnostic tests: If your doctor suspects irAEs, blood tests, imaging studies, and other diagnostic tools may be used to identify them.
- Patient self-monitoring: Be vigilant about any new or worsening symptoms and report them promptly.

How Are irAEs Managed?

- Medication: Corticosteroids and other medications may be prescribed to manage symptoms, depending on the severity of the symptoms.
- Treatment adjustments: Your health care team may modify or temporarily halt immunotherapy based on the severity of irAEs.
- Collaborative decision making: Engage in open discussions with your health care team to determine the best course of action for your specific case.

Questions for My Doctor

- What is my specific immunotherapy treatment plan?
- Are there certain factors that increase my risk for irAEs?
- How often will I be monitored for potential irAEs?
- What symptoms should I be vigilant about, and how should I report them?

For More Information



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National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/types/immunotherapy/checkpoint-inhibitors#what-side-effects-are-caused-by-immune-checkpoint-inhibitors

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy/immune-checkpoint-inhibitors.html