



Immunotherapy Side Effect: Pneumonitis

What is pneumonitis?

Pneumonitis is when your lungs are inflamed, which means they are swollen and irritated. Pneumonitis can be caused by breathing in a toxin or allergen. It can also be a side effect of some cancer treatments, like [radiation therapy](#) or a type of medication called [immunotherapy](#).

This article will focus on pneumonitis caused by immunotherapy medications. For more information, read more about [pneumonitis](#) and [radiation pneumonitis](#) at OncoLink.org.

How can immunotherapy cause pneumonitis?

Immunotherapy medications stimulate (rev up) your body's immune system. In some cases, the immune system may not only attack cancer cells but may also attack healthy cells, like those in the lungs.

Some immunotherapy side effects can be common and mild, while some side effects can be severe or even life-threatening. These side effects can happen at any time during treatment or even after treatment has ended. It is important to know the signs and symptoms of pneumonitis if you had or are getting immunotherapy. These signs and symptoms are listed below.

What are the signs and symptoms of pneumonitis?

Pneumonitis can cause:

- Shortness of breath.
- Low levels of oxygen in the body.
- Fever.
- Cough.
- Chest pain when taking a breath.

How is pneumonitis treated?

Knowing what to look for and treating the symptoms of pneumonitis early is important. Many side effects of immunotherapy are treatable, including pneumonitis, but it is important to call your provider right away with any changes in how you are feeling.

The treatment of pneumonitis depends on how serious your immune reaction is. Your provider may want to keep a close eye on you but may not change your treatment. You might be given medications to help with inflammation. If the reaction is severe, your treatment may be held or stopped.

When should I call my care team?

If you are taking any immunotherapy medication, you should call your care team as soon as you have any changes in how you are feeling. You should also make sure that any provider involved in your care knows you are taking an immunotherapy medication.

Remember, side effects of immunotherapy can happen during and even after your treatment ends. Read more about [immunotherapy](#) and its [side effects](#) at [OncoLink.org](https://www.oncolink.org).

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