

# Targeted Drug Therapy for Cancer

Targeted drugs are a type of treatment that uses medicine to find and attack certain parts of cancer cells. These drugs are used to treat some types of cancer, but not everyone who has cancer will get targeted therapy.

Targeted drugs work in a different way from standard chemotherapy (chemo) drugs. They also usually have different kinds of side effects.



## How do targeted drugs work?

Targeted drugs work by finding and targeting certain parts of cancer cells. Different targeted drugs can:

- Stop cancer cells from growing
- Change proteins in the cancer cells so the cells die
- Trigger the immune system to kill the cancer cells
- Carry chemicals or radiation to the cancer cells to kill them

Targeted drug therapy can be the only treatment that's needed for some cancers. Or, sometimes it can be given with other treatments like chemotherapy, surgery, or radiation therapy.



## How is it given and how long does treatment last?

Some types of targeted drugs are given at outpatient clinics as an infusion through an IV line that is put into a vein. Others are given by mouth as a pill, capsule, or liquid and can be taken at home.

Because each person's treatment is different, how long it lasts can be different, too.



## Side effects

Side effects depend on the drug that's given. Because these drugs can affect different targets, not everyone getting targeted drugs will have the same side effects. Some common side effects include:

- Skin changes like itching, rash, dry skin, being sensitive to light, and changes in skin color
- Changes in hair growth or color
- High blood pressure
- Bleeding problems
- Blood clots
- Changes in how the heart works
- Swelling in the face, feet, legs, or hands

Talk to your doctor about what specific side effects you might have from your treatment.



## Questions to ask

Here are some questions you can ask your doctor and health care team:

- What type of targeted drug will I get?
- How often will I get treatment?
- Do I need to go somewhere to get my treatment?
- How long will my treatment last?
- Will my insurance pay for my treatment?  
How much will I have to pay?
- What side effects could I have?
- How can my side effects be managed and what can I do about them?
- Are there any special things I need to do to protect myself and others while getting treatment?
- When should I call the doctor or nurse?

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support,  
call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345**  
or visit us online at **[cancer.org/targetedtherapy](https://cancer.org/targetedtherapy)**.  
We're here when you need us.



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