



BCG frequently asked questions

What is BCG?

- Bacille Calmette-Guérin (**BCG**) is an immunotherapy drug used to treat some non-invasive bladder cancers. BCG is a milder form of the live bacterium that causes tuberculosis.
- It is given directly into the bladder (intravesical), via a catheter.
- Each treatment takes 2-3 hours and you are often asked to change positions from stomach, back and both sides to ensure your entire bladder is coated.
- BCG helps prevent the cancer from coming back into the bladder lining and also helps prevent the cancer from becoming invasive. It stimulates the person's immune system to fight the cancer cells.

How soon after diagnosis should you start BCG treatment?

- Ideally start BCG, 2-4 weeks after a TURBT (cystoscopy and biopsy).
- You should wait at least 14 days after a TURBT, so that the BCG cannot enter the blood stream through any open biopsy wounds.
- Prior to BCG treatment, you should no longer see blood in the urine.

How often do you have BCG treatment?

There are 2 phases of BCG treatment:

- **Induction**
BCG is given weekly for 6 weeks.

You may have a delay of a week or two between treatments, if you have a urinary tract infection or ongoing symptoms from the previous treatment.

- **Maintenance** (after the induction phase is complete)
There are many different schedules, commonly:
 - Once a month for a year *or*
 - 3 weeks in a row, once every 3 months for 12 -36 months.



BCG frequently asked questions

What are the common side effects of BCG treatment?

- Most people will get symptoms similar to a urinary tract infection:
 - Burning, stinging, painful urination
 - Passing urine more frequently
 - Occasionally pass some blood
 - May also get urgency (bladder spasms) – i.e. need to get to toilet quickly or may have an accident!
- Flu like symptoms:
 - Tiredness
 - General aches and pains
 - Raised temperature

What are the less common but possible more severe side effects of BCG?

- Continuing high temperature
- Joint pain
- Severe tiredness
- Cough
- Nausea and vomiting
- Prolonged feeling of generally being unwell

What helps relieve or minimise the side effects?

- Ural sachets, drink lots of water, cranberry juice.
- May need Panadol or other simple pain relief if you are having bladder pain or spasms.
- Muscle relaxants such as Vesicare, Ditropan or Betmiga can also be used to treat bladder spasms. In severe cases, a steroid, such as prednisolone may be required.
- Sometimes a break from BCG is needed to recover.

How many BCG treatments are “normal”?

- Usually 6 as induction:
 - May need second course of 6 treatments if there is still cancer at the first check-up cystoscopy.
- Most patients will have maintenance BCG:
 - If lots of side effects experienced with induction, a patient may not have maintenance, or your doctor may recommend a trial of half strength BCG.