

Lung issues: After bleomycin treatment

Health information after cancer treatment as a child or teenager

The purpose of this factsheet is to tell you about long-term side effects (called 'late effects') that can happen after having cancer treatment. They can happen soon after treatment has finished or later in life. The medical team at the hospital where you received your treatment or your long-term follow-up team will be able to help you with specific information about which late effects are relevant to you.

Bleomycin is a chemotherapy drug used to treat cancer. It can sometimes cause damage to the lungs leading to inflammation (interstitial pneumonitis) and scarring (fibrosis) which can cause breathing difficulties. These problems can be made worse by inhaling cigarette smoke, toxic fumes, or high concentrations of oxygen such as during an anaesthetic. They can also be worsened by lung infections. As the lungs are vital organs supplying oxygen to the body, it is important for you to find out what you can do to keep them healthy and precautions you may need to follow.

Who is at risk?

You are at risk of developing lung problems if you had bleomycin, especially in addition to any of the following:

- radiotherapy to the lungs, chest or spine
- total body irradiation (TBI)
- other drugs that can cause damage to the lungs (see CCLG late effects factsheet - lung issues)
- smoking
- exposure to high oxygen levels over several hours (eg. general anaesthetic or scuba diving)

How do we monitor lung issues?

- Pulmonary (lung) function tests and a chest X-ray at least once after completion of all cancer treatment. Your doctors can decide with you if further testing is required, based on the results and your previous treatment.

- Additional pulmonary function tests and a chest X-ray may be recommended if you are scheduled to have surgery or a procedure that needs a general anaesthetic

What can I do?

You can help reduce your risks by:

- **avoid smoking** (including passive smoking)
- take **regular exercise** and eat a **healthy diet**
- consider **yearly flu and covid vaccinations**, especially if you have evidence of lung problems
- consider wearing **medical alert identification** (www.medicalert.org.uk)
- **inform your doctor** that you have received bleomycin in the past, before any treatment or operation that may require an anaesthetic and oxygen
- **avoid breathing high concentration of oxygen** for long periods of time whenever possible
- **avoid scuba diving** until you have received further advice and assessment by a medical referee approved by the UK Sport Diving Medical Committee (UKSDMC). (www.bsac.com)
- **follow safety regulations** in your work place and avoid breathing toxic fumes

