



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Understanding Biologics

Biologic treatments can provide significant health improvements for people with many different medical conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, and inflammatory bowel disease, among others. Before using them, you should learn some things about risks and how you'll receive treatments. Reviewing this list of vocabulary and potential questions will help make the most of your time as you discuss treatment options with your clinician.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Biologic	A class of medical therapies that are manufactured from living organisms. They are different from traditional pharmaceutical medications. There are many different types of biologics which work in different ways.
Biosimilar	A particular category of biologic therapy. They work very similarly to an originally FDA-approved biologic therapy, and are often less expensive. Not all biologics have approved biosimilar products.
Contraindication	A medical situation in which a given therapy shouldn't be given. For example, some medical conditions are a contraindication to receiving certain biologic therapies.
Cytokine	An immune-signaling molecule, part of the immune system. Some biologics work by blocking the signaling of specific cytokines.
Hepatitis	Inflammation of the liver. This can be caused by infection with viruses like hepatitis B or hepatitis C. You may need screenings for these viruses before starting your therapy, since some biologics might cause dormant viruses to become reactivated.
Immunosuppression	A reduction in the body's ability to respond to certain kinds of infection. Some biologic therapies affect the immune system and may cause immunosuppression.
Infusion	A medication that is given via the bloodstream through a catheter inserted into a vein. Some biologic therapies are given through infusion at a medical facility or outpatient therapy center. Other types of biologics may be given via injection.
Live Vaccines	Vaccines which include some sort of component that is still living. For example, the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine is a live vaccine. Live vaccines are not safe to take for people on certain kinds of biologics.
TNF-blocker/ TNF inhibitor	One popular type of biologic therapy used for several different health conditions. This biologic therapy blocks the signaling of an immune molecule known as TNF (tumor necrosis factor).
Tuberculosis	An infectious medical condition that can affect the lungs and other organs. Some biologics have a risk of reactivating a tuberculosis infection that you might not know about, so some people need tuberculosis screening before starting their biologic.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about using biologic therapy for treatment.

About Understanding Biologic Therapy

- Why do you think I need a biologic for my condition?
- How does my particular biologic work?
- Do I have any medical conditions that increase risks?
- Are there any non-biologic alternatives? What are the possible advantages or disadvantages of these?
- Is there another potential biologic available?
- Is a lower-cost biosimilar treatment available?

About What to Do Before Starting Biologics

- What medical assessments do I need before starting a biologic?
- Will I need to have any blood tests before starting?
- Do I need to be screened for hepatitis, tuberculosis, or other conditions?
- Do I need any vaccines before starting?
- Do I need any cancer screenings before starting?

About How Biologic Therapy Will Work

- How and where will the biologic be administered?
- Will I receive any medications prior to receiving my biologic?
- How often will I receive treatment?
- Do I need to learn how to give the biologic to myself? How will I do this?
- If applicable, how do I need to store the biologic?
- Under what conditions might I need to delay starting biologic therapy?
- How much will my biologic therapy cost?
- Are there any medications I need to stop taking when I start my biologic?



About Potential Side Effects of the Biologic

- What are the potential side effects of my biologic?
Which of these are the most likely?
- What can I do to manage these side effects?
- What symptoms should I call and tell you about, if I notice problems after starting my biologic?
- What symptoms should prompt a call to 911?
- Will I be immunosuppressed while taking my biologic?
If so, what do I need to do to help protect myself from infection?

About What to Expect After Starting a Biologic

- When might I start to feel better after starting my biologic?
- Will I need regular blood tests or screenings while taking my biologic? If so, how often?
- When will we evaluate how well I am responding to the biologic?
