

## Understanding NICE guidance

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Information for people who use NHS services

# Trastuzumab for treating metastatic gastric cancer

*NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.*

This leaflet is about when **trastuzumab** should be used to treat people with metastatic gastric cancer (cancer of the stomach, including cancer of the gastro-oesophageal junction – the join between the stomach and oesophagus) in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It does not cover using this drug to treat other types of cancer. It is written for people with metastatic gastric cancer but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe metastatic gastric cancer or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on the back page.



*This may not be the only possible treatment for metastatic gastric cancer. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.*

## What has NICE said?

NICE recommends trastuzumab as a possible treatment for some people (see below) with a type of HER2-positive metastatic gastric cancer called adenocarcinoma.

## Who can have trastuzumab?

You should be able to have trastuzumab if:

- you have a type of cancer that scores three when tested for HER2 **and**
- you have not had treatment for metastatic gastric cancer before.

You can ask your healthcare professional to explain HER2 testing.

## Why has NICE said this?

NICE looks at how well treatments work, and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS. NICE applies special considerations to treatments that can extend the lives of people who are nearing the end of their life. NICE recommended trastuzumab because it works better than other treatments available on the NHS. Although it also costs more than other treatments, this was justified by the benefits it provided when the special considerations were applied.

## HER2-positive metastatic gastric cancer

Cancer can develop in any part of the stomach. It can also develop at the join between the stomach and the oesophagus (food pipe). Symptoms include indigestion (heartburn), loss of appetite, pain and nausea.

Cancer is described as metastatic if it has spread to other parts of the body, such as the liver, bones or brain. HER2-positive means that there are high levels of a protein called HER2 on the surface of the cancer cells. Another protein produced naturally in the body attaches itself to the HER2 protein, which makes the cancer grow.

## Trastuzumab

Trastuzumab (also known as Herceptin) is a monoclonal antibody drug. Trastuzumab attaches itself to the HER2 protein on the cancer cells and stops them from growing. Trastuzumab will only work in people who have HER2-positive cancer. Trastuzumab is used with chemotherapy drugs to treat gastric cancer.

### What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have HER2-positive metastatic gastric cancer, and you and your doctor think that trastuzumab is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' across the page), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see

[www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance) if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

If you are already taking trastuzumab for HER2-positive metastatic gastric cancer, you should be able to continue taking it until you and your specialist decide it is the right time to stop.

## More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with gastric cancer. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- CancerHelp UK, 0808 800 4040  
[www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 0000  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- Rarer Cancers Foundation, 0800 434 6476  
[www.rarercancers.org.uk](http://www.rarercancers.org.uk)

NHS Choices ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

## About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

*To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance)*

*This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA208](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA208)*

*You can order printed copies of this leaflet from NICE publications (phone 0845 003 7783 or email [publications@nice.org.uk](mailto:publications@nice.org.uk) and quote reference N2364). The NICE website has a screen reader service called *Browsealoud*, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the *Browsealoud* logo on the NICE website to use this service.*

*We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this leaflet in their own information about gastric cancer.*