

RESEARCH SAVES LIVES

Immunotherapy is a relatively new and promising area of breast cancer treatment that boosts the body’s own immune system to fight cancer. There are many types of immunotherapies, including monoclonal antibodies and vaccines, among others.

Monoclonal antibodies can be used many ways. When used as an immunotherapy, they help the immune system work better at killing cancer cells. They can attach to specific proteins on cancer cells, which flags the cells so the immune system can find and destroy them. They can also work by releasing the brakes on the body’s immune system so it can destroy cancer cells. Some cancer cells disguise themselves as normal cells and hijack immune system pathways called “immune checkpoints” to escape attack. Monoclonal antibodies called checkpoint inhibitors block this “identity theft” by cancer cells and help the immune system find and kill the cancer cells.

A vaccine is another type of immunotherapy. Like a traditional vaccine, such as mumps or measles, a breast cancer vaccine exposes the immune system to a tumor protein called an antigen. This triggers the immune system to make antibodies against that antigen, and attack and destroy the cancer cells. There are two types of cancer vaccines: treatment, which are designed to treat cancers that have already developed or that could recur; and preventive, which are intended to prevent cancer from developing.

New treatments are urgently needed to increase patient survival. Immunotherapy is developing rapidly and appears especially promising as new research shows improved outcomes for some types of breast cancers. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first immunotherapy – atezolizumab – for a subset of patients with advanced breast cancer in 2019. In addition, immunotherapies are being evaluated in clinical trials for patients with nearly all types of breast cancer.

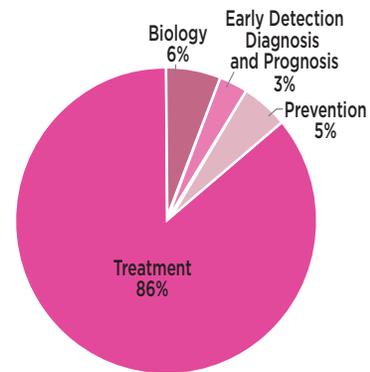
OUR RESEARCH INVESTMENT: (1982-2019) **More than \$53 million in 140 research grants and more than 15 clinical trials focused on vaccines and immunotherapy**

What We’re Investigating



- Testing whether the body’s own immune cells can be targeted to prevent or treat metastatic breast cancer to the brain or lungs.
- Developing biomarkers that can predict who will respond to different immunotherapies.
- Determining whether immunotherapies can be combined with other drugs or radiotherapy to prevent or treat drug resistant breast cancer.

Topic Area of Total Investment



Read how Dr. Susan Thomas and her team at the Georgia Institute of Technology is using nano-technology to deliver immunotherapy to make them more effective at treating breast cancer and preventing metastasis. <http://sgk.mn/2woGyD4>

Learn more about emerging areas in breast cancer therapy <http://sgk.mn/ZqBVGB>

WHAT WE’VE LEARNED from Komen-funded research

-  Delivering immunotherapies directly to lymph nodes—using nanotechnology—may stimulate the body’s own immune system to kill both primary and metastatic breast cancer.
-  Targeting the sugar molecules attached to the body’s own immune cells may increase their ability to attack TNBC cells and make them more sensitive to current immunotherapies.
-  A novel drug that targets a molecule found in certain immune cells, called CaMKK2, may be effective at treating triple negative breast cancer (TNBC).