

Male Sex Hormones Act as New Targets for Cancer Immunotherapy

New insights into why men fail to mount as powerful an immune response to many cancers as women do.

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Men often fare worse than women when it comes to cancers that originate in nonreproductive organs, such as [bladder](#) and [liver cancer](#). Men tend to have higher incidence, faster progression, poorer response to treatment and worse survival, but why this is the case has not been understood.

Now a landmark study has pinpointed how male sex hormones may affect immunity in ways that alter men's response to cancer and cancer treatment. [The study](#), published in *Science Immunology*, looked at the differences in immune responses in tumor cells extracted from male and female patients.

Researchers from the Pelotonia Institute for Immuno-Oncology at The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center focused on T-cell immune responses, which play an important role in cancer outcomes and have helped drive major advances in cancer [immunotherapy](#) in recent years.

Androgens—male sex hormones, a class that includes testosterone—are present in higher concentrations in males. The study found that they contribute to sex differences in cancer outcomes by weakening the tumor-fighting function of CD8 T cells (commonly known as “killer” T cells), resulting in [“exhausted” T cells](#).

“Androgen-mediated promotion of CD8 T cell dysfunction results in faster tumor growth and worsened outcomes, and targeting of this signaling cascade holds a crucial key to improving current cancer immunotherapies,” the study's senior corresponding author, Zihai Li, MD, PhD, [said in a news release](#).

To learn more, see [“How Does the Immune System Fight Cancer?”](#)
