



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Taking Oral Medications for Cancer Treatment

This information explains how to take oral medications to prevent, treat, or control cancer. Oral medications are medications you take by mouth, such as pills or tablets.

Be sure to tell all your healthcare providers, including your dentist and your pharmacist, that you're taking medication for cancer.

What are some ways to help me remember to take my cancer medications?

Oral medication for cancer will only work if you take it exactly the way your doctor prescribed it. To be sure you take it correctly, use a system that works for you, such as:

- Keeping a pill diary
- Using a calendar or daily medication checklist
- Using a pillbox only for your oral medication for cancer. Don't keep any of your other medication in that pillbox.
- Setting electronic reminders using:
 - Cell phone alarms
 - Alarm clocks
 - Timers
 - Smartphone applications, such as [Mobile MyMSK](#)

If you're not sure what system will work well for you, talk with your nurse and a friend or family member who can help you.

What should I know about taking my cancer medication safely?

- Wash your hands before and after you touch your medication.
- If you're a caregiver, wear gloves when you touch these medications and wash your hands afterward.
- Don't crush, chew, or cut your medication unless you were instructed to do so.
- If each dose is in a separate package, such as foil packaging, don't open the package until it's time to take it.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- If it has been 2 hours or less since the time you were supposed to take your medication, take it.
- If it has been more than 2 hours since you were supposed to take it, call your doctor's office.
- Don't take 2 doses at the same time.
- Don't take any extra doses.
- If you vomit (throw up) the medication, call your doctor's office. Don't take another dose.

How do I store and throw out my cancer medication?

- Store your medication at room temperature (unless you're given other instructions).
- Store your medication in a dry place. Don't store it in a bathroom.
- Keep the medication somewhere safe and away from children and pets.
- Ask your pharmacist or nurse how to throw out any medications you don't use.

How can I make sure all my healthcare providers know what medications I take?

Always carry a list of all of the medications that you take with you. Include your medication for cancer and all prescription and over-the-counter medications (medications you buy without a prescription), supplements, and creams. For every medication and supplement, include:

- The name of the medication
- How much you take
- How you take it (such as by mouth or a shot)
- When you take it
- Why you take it (such as what type of cancer you have)

If you need help making this list, tell your healthcare provider. If you're taking oral chemotherapy, bring it with you in the original prescription bottle when you see your doctor. Your doctor will tell you if you need to bring it to the hospital if you're admitted. Don't bring any other medications with you unless instructed by your doctor.

Call Your Doctor or Nurse:

- If you're running low on your medication, you must call your doctor's office at least 5 business days (Monday through Friday) before you will run out. This is so your doctor can send a refill to your pharmacy.
- Before stopping or changing your medication for any reason.
- If you're having trouble getting your medication from the pharmacy.
- If you're having trouble paying for your medication.
- If you take more medication than what your doctor prescribed.
- If you missed a dose of your medication and it's been more than 2 hours.
- If you're having any new symptoms or side effects. Your doctor or nurse will give you information about what to look for.
- If you have any questions about how to take this medication.

Special Instructions

For more information about taking your medication, review the medication handout your healthcare provider gave you. If you have any questions or concerns, call your doctor's office.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Taking Oral Medications for Cancer Treatment - Last updated on March 15, 2018
©2019 Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center