Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Taking Oral Medications for Cancer Treatment

This information explains how to take oral medicine to prevent, treat, or control cancer. Oral means you take it 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 medicine for cancer.

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

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

- Keep a pill diary.
- Use a calendar or daily medicine checklist.
- Set electronic reminders using cell phone alarms, alarm clocks, or timers. You can also use smartphone applications, such as .
- Use a pillbox only for your oral medicine for cancer. **Do not keep any of your other medicine in that pillbox.**

Some medicines are not safe to put in a pillbox. Follow your care team's instructions.

You may not know which system will work well for you. Talk with your healthcare provider and a friend or family member who can help you.

What should I know about taking my cancer medicine safely?

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before and after you touch your medicine.
- If you're a caregiver, wear gloves when you touch the medicine. Wash your hands after.
- Do not crush, chew, or cut the medicine unless you were told to do so.
- If each dose is in a separate package, such as foil packaging, do not open it until it's time to take it.

How should I handle my body fluids if I'm taking chemotherapy?

Some of your medicine may be in your body fluids during and after your therapy. These include urine, bowel movements, vomit, saliva, vaginal fluid, or semen. Read *How to Safely Handle Chemotherapy and Biotherapy at Home* (www.mskcc.org/pe/safe-handling-chemo-bio) to learn more.

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 medicine, take it.
- If it has been **more than 2 hours** since you were supposed to take it, call your healthcare provider's office.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time.
- Do not take any extra doses.
- If you vomit (throw up) the medicine, call your healthcare provider's office. Do not take another dose.

How do I store and throw out my cancer medicine?

- Store your medicine at room temperature (unless you're given other instructions).
- Store your medicine in a dry place. Do not store it in a bathroom.
- Keep the medicine somewhere safe and away from children and pets.
- Ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider how to throw out any medicine you do not use.

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

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

- The name of the medicine
- 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 healthcare provider. They will tell you if you must bring it to the hospital if you're admitted.

Do not bring any other medicine with you unless your healthcare provider tells you to.

When to call your healthcare provider

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

To learn more about taking your medicine, review the medicine handout your healthcare provider gave you.

Special instructions

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

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

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