

What You Need to Know About Oral Anti-Cancer Medications

Your oncologist has prescribed an oral anti-cancer medication (medication taken by mouth to treat cancer) for you. This handout offers information on oral anti-cancer medications. The cancer centre pharmacist or nurse will give you a handout on the oral anti-cancer medication prescribed for you.

Talk to a member of your healthcare team if:

- You have problems paying for your oral anti-cancer medication.
- Your local pharmacy is not able to fill the prescription for your oral anti-cancer medication.

How to take oral anti-cancer medications

- Take your oral anti-cancer medication as prescribed by your oncologist.
- Wash your hands with soap and water **before** and **after** you touch your oral anti-cancer medication. Your family member/partner-in-care will need to wear gloves if they are helping you take your oral anti-cancer medication.
- Swallow each tablet or capsule whole. **Do not** crush, chew or cut the tablet. **Do not** open the capsules unless your healthcare team tells you to do this.
- Use a calendar to remind you to take your oral anti-cancer medication on the right day.
- Use an alarm clock to remind you to take your oral anti-cancer medication at the right time of day.
- The pharmacist will tell you if you need to take your oral anti-cancer medication on an empty stomach or with food.

Questions you may have about oral anti-cancer medications

1. What if I take too many oral anti-cancer medications by mistake?

Call the Ontario Poison Centre at 1-844-764-7669 (toll-free). Have the bottle or package of your oral anti-cancer medication with you when you call.

2. What if I miss a dose of my oral anti-cancer medication?

Read the handout the pharmacist or nurse gave you about the oral anti-cancer medication you are taking. This handout will tell you what to do if you missed a dose of your oral anti-cancer medication.

3. What if I become sick and vomit?

Do not take an extra dose of your oral anti-cancer medication if you vomit after taking it. Call the pharmacist or nurse at the cancer centre if you are not able to keep your oral anti-cancer medication in your stomach.

4. What if a child accidentally swallows my oral anti-cancer medication?

Take the child to the emergency department at the hospital closest to you right away. Take the bottle or package of your oral anti-cancer medication with you.

5. What if a pet swallows my oral anti-cancer medication?

Call your veterinarian right away.

How to store oral anti-cancer medications

Keep your oral anti-cancer medication:

- In the original container or package the pharmacist put them in. Do not put them in the same container with other medications without checking this with the cancer centre pharmacist.
- In a cool dry place and away from sunlight. Read the label on the container or package to see if you need to keep your medication in the refrigerator.
- In a place that is safe and away from children and pets.

Protecting yourself and anyone who gives you care

Oral anti-cancer medications leave your body through your body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid). **Follow the steps below for 7 days after** you take your oral anti-cancer medication. These steps will protect you and anyone who gives you care. If there are not 7 days between the days you take your oral anti-cancer medications, you need to follow these steps every day.

You need to:

- Wash off any body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid) that get on your skin with soap and water.
- Sit down to use the toilet. Close the lid and flush the toilet twice after you use it.
- Keep a plastic container close to you at all times. You can use it to vomit in if you cannot get to the bathroom.
- Wash anything that comes in contact with your body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid) right away. Wash the item(s) 2 separate times in soap and hot water in a washing machine when possible. Do not wash with other laundry.
- Use a condom or dental dam for all sexual activity. If there is any chance you or your partner may become pregnant, you need to use 2 effective forms of birth control while you are on oral anti-cancer treatment. Talk to your healthcare team about this.

Anyone who gives you care needs to:

- Wash their skin with soap and water if any of your body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid) gets on them.
- Wear disposable gloves and use paper towels to clean up any of your body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid) or to touch any items that have body fluids on them. Put the gloves and paper towels in a sealed plastic bag. Put this bag in the garbage.
- Wear disposable gloves to wash any non-disposable equipment (for example: bedpans, urinals, commodes, or vomit basins) with soap and hot water after you have used them.
- Wash anything that comes in contact with your body fluids (urine, sweat, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid) as soon as possible. Wash the item(s) 2 separate times in soap and hot water in a washing machine when possible. Do not wash with other laundry.
- Rinse their eyes with water 2 to 3 times if any of your body fluid splashes into them.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women and children should not touch any of your oral anti-cancer medication, your body fluids or laundry with your body fluids on it.

What to do with unused, damaged or expired oral anti-cancer medications

Put any unused, damaged or expired oral anti-cancer medications in a re-sealable zipper storage bag. Take this bag to your pharmacy for safe disposal.

- **Do not** throw them out in your garbage
- **Do not** flush them down your toilet
- **Do not** wash them down your sink

Who you need to tell that you are taking an oral anti-cancer medication

Tell other members of your healthcare team (for example: your family doctor, your dentist, your pharmacist, your naturopath, the walk-in clinic doctor, the doctor and nurse in the emergency department etc.) that you are taking an oral anti-cancer medication. Carry an up-to-date list of your medications with you at all times. Let your healthcare team know if any changes are made in the medications you are taking.

Call your nurse at the cancer centre if you:

- Have trouble swallowing your oral anti-cancer medication
- Are not able to keep the oral anti-cancer medication in your stomach
- Have taken an extra dose of your oral anti-cancer medication
- Are given a new medication from another doctor
- Are thinking of taking any natural or herbal product
- Have questions or concerns about any side effects that you have

If you have a problem or concern about a symptom or side effect from your cancer treatment:

1. Call your primary nurse at the cancer centre from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4 pm (except on holidays). Use the phone number your primary nurse gave you.
2. Contact CareChart Digital Health from Monday to Friday, 4 pm to 8:30 am and anytime on weekends and holidays for symptom management support.

Talk to a nurse using one of these options:

- Call the after-hours telephone line at 1-877-681-3057.
- Request a video call by going to carechart.ca
- Use the CareChart Digital Health App. This App is available to download for iOS or Android devices.

Call 911 or go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you for a medical emergency. Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any information in this handout.

This handout was created by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre/Lakeridge Health. It was last reviewed in July 2024.