

Safe Handling of Oral Medications for Cancer Therapy

Oral medications for cancer therapy are taken by mouth in the form of capsules, tablets or liquid. These tips will help you understand how to safely take oral chemotherapy. This information will also help your caregiver avoid exposure to unsafe body waste in your home. It is important to understand that oral medications are very potent and can be just as dangerous as chemotherapy that is given through a vein.

How to Take Your Medication

- Swallow each tablet or capsule whole; do not chew them. If you are unable to swallow the pill, talk to the pharmacist about other ways to take your medication.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. Do not double the dose. See the information that came with your medicine for more information. If you are on a clinical trial, you will be given special instructions if you miss a dose.
- If you are instructed to dissolve the cancer medication in liquid, do this in a paper or plastic cup that can be thrown away.
- If you become sick and are unable to keep the pill down, make sure to call your doctor.

Storage

- Most oral medicine is stored at room temperature, away from excessive heat and moisture. Do not store your medication in the bathroom. Check medication labels to see if special storage or handling is needed, such as refrigeration or protected from light.
- Keep the medicine in its original container, in a safe place away from other family medications. All medications need to be kept out of the reach of children and pets.

Body Fluids

- Small amounts of chemotherapy are present in your urine, stool, semen and vomit. If you are exposed to any body wastes, wash the area that is touched with soap and water.
- You may use the toilet as usual. Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet, and wash your skin if urine, vomit or stool gets on other parts of your body.
- Others in your household may use the same toilet as long as all waste is flushed down the toilet.

Caregivers

- Caregivers should wash hands before and after giving oral medications, or can wear gloves when handling the medication.
- Always wear gloves when disposing of urinal or commode waste and cleaning of equipment. Wash your skin if touched by urine, vomit or stool.

Contacts

- If you feel you are having side effects from the cancer therapy or have any questions or concerns, contact your oncologist.

Disposal of Medication

Normally you will not have extra medication, but if you do, follow these steps for disposal.

- Do NOT flush your medication down the drain or toilet. Instead, “Wrap and Trash” the medication by wrapping with duct tape and then wrapping in two plastic bags before putting in the trash.
- Another method of disposal is to take the medication out of its original container and mix with kitty litter or used coffee grounds and then put this in a can or zipper bag and throw away.

You may also contact your public health department to see if they have a drug disposal program or contact the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality at (517)335-2690 or www.michigan.gov/degwaste

This information was adapted from the Third Edition of the Chemotherapy and Biotherapy Guidelines and Recommendations for Practice, Appendix 3 Safe Management of Chemotherapy in the Home, by the Oncology Nursing Society, the University of Michigan HomeMed Medication Patient Guide, Michigan Department of Public Health Medical Waste Regulatory Program.

**This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services.
Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education.
Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.**