

Safe Handling of Chemotherapy Taken by Mouth

Chemotherapy can be just as hazardous, no matter how you take or receive it—whether by mouth, through a vein, or in other ways. As such, it's important to know how to protect yourself and others.

The focus of this handout is on chemotherapy. However, your care team may also advise you to take precautions when receiving other potentially hazardous cancer treatments.

Note: Not all cancer treatments are hazardous. Talk with your care team to confirm if you are taking a medication that requires special precautions.

How should I handle my chemotherapy?

- People who are or might be pregnant should avoid handling chemotherapy.
- Store your chemotherapy in the provided packaging.
- Keep your chemotherapy out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not break, crush, or chew chemotherapy tablets. Do not break, open, or chew chemotherapy capsules.
 - If you have trouble swallowing your chemotherapy, ask your care team for instructions on how to take the chemotherapy safely.
- Whenever possible, give your chemotherapy to yourself and follow the steps below. If anyone else needs to give your chemotherapy to you, they also need to follow these steps:
 1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
 2. Put on gloves to avoid touching the medication. (Gloves are not necessary if you give the drug to yourself.)
 3. Transfer the chemotherapy from its packaging to a small, disposable cup or other container for medication.
 4. Administer the chemotherapy immediately by mouth with water.
 5. Remove your gloves and do not reuse them for any other purposes.
 6. Throw your gloves and medicine cup in the household trash.
 7. Wash your hands with soap and water.

How should my chemotherapy be stored?

- Store your chemotherapy in a location with a controlled temperature that is not exposed to direct sunlight.
- Some chemotherapy may require specific storage instructions (like being stored in a refrigerator). Ask your care team if there are specific storage instructions for your chemotherapy.
- Your care team may be comfortable with you using a daily pill box or pill reminder. However, some products specifically recommend against storing the chemotherapy outside of its original packaging. Ask your care team if you can use a daily pill box or pill reminder.
- If you are traveling, pack your chemotherapy in its original packaging (not a pill box or pill reminder) in a sealed plastic bag. Ask your care team if you need to follow any additional travel precautions.

If my treatment is changed or stopped, what should I do with leftover chemotherapy?

- Do not dispose of chemotherapy in the garbage or down the toilet.
 - **Note:** If you need to dispose of your chemotherapy quickly, follow these instructions:
 - Mix whole pills (do not crush or open) in used coffee grounds or cat litter.
 - Place the mixture in a container (e.g., an empty laundry detergent or bleach bottle) and secure the lid tightly. Alternatively, double-bag the mix in plastic storage bags.
 - Place the sealed container in your household trash.
- Store your chemotherapy in a safe place until you can return it.
- Ask your care team about the closest state or local medication disposal sites or drop boxes for disposing of hazardous material.

Handling Body Fluids and Waste

Some medications you receive may stay in your urine, stool, sweat, or vomit for many days after treatment. Because many cancer treatments are hazardous (toxic), your body waste may also be dangerous to touch. To help protect yourself, your loved ones, and the environment, follow these instructions for at least 48 hours (Note: Some medications may require an extended precaution period):

- Pregnant women should avoid touching anything that may be soiled with body fluids from the patient.
- You can use your usual toilet. Always close the lid and flush to discard all waste. If you have a low-flow toilet, flush twice.
- If the toilet or seat is soiled with urine, stool, or vomit, clean the surface after each use before others use it.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the toilet.
- If you need a bedpan, inform your caregiver so they can wear gloves and assist with cleanup. Wash the bedpan with soap and water daily.
- If you are unable to control your bladder or bowels, use a disposable pad with a plastic backing, a diaper, or a sheet to absorb waste.
- Wash any skin exposed to body waste with soap and water.
- Wash soiled linens or clothing separately from other laundry. If you don't have a washer, place them in a plastic bag until you can wash them.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after touching soiled linens or clothing.

Notes

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Scan the QR code below to access this education sheet.



Important notice: The Association of Cancer Care Centers (ACCC), Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA), Network for Collaborative Oncology Development & Advancement, Inc. (NCODA), and Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) have collaborated in gathering information for and developing this patient education guide. This guide represents a brief summary of the medication derived from information provided by the drug manufacturer and other resources.

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