Safe Oral Chemotherapy Handling for Patients and Caregivers

Oral chemotherapy medicines are given by mouth in the form of capsules, tablets or liquid. These safety tips will help you understand what to do when you are taking oral chemotherapy.

**How to take the drug**

- Swallow each tablet or capsule whole; do not break, crush, or chew them.
- If you are unable to swallow the pill, speak with 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. If you’re on a clinical trial, you will be given special instructions if you miss a dose.
- If you’re unable to swallow pills and if you are instructed to dissolve the chemotherapy medication in liquid, use disposable cups. If you are unable to keep the pill down, call your physician.

**Storage**

Most oral chemotherapy medicine is stored at room temperature, away from excessive heat and moisture. You will be told if the medication you are taking needs special storage or handling. Some oral chemotherapy medications need to be stored in the refrigerator until used.

**Safe management of oral chemotherapy in the home**

This information is provided to help your caregiver avoid exposure to hazardous body waste in your home. Special care must be taken to prevent the patient's body waste from coming into accidental contact with the caregiver.

Oral chemotherapy stays in your body for hours or even days, and is excreted in urine and stool. If you vomit after taking the chemotherapy, the vomitus may also contain some of the chemotherapy.

**Body wastes**

You may use the toilet (septic tank or city sewage) as usual. Flush the toilet twice with the lid closed after use and continue to do so for 48 hours after the last chemotherapy dose. 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.

If a caregiver handles patient waste, always wear gloves in disposing of urinal or commode waste and cleaning of equipment. Wash your skin if urine, vomit or stool gets on it.
**Sexual Intercourse**

Patients who are getting chemo (this includes treatments for cancer that come in pill form) or their sexual partner should use condoms when having sexual intercourse. Pregnancy should be avoided during this time because some treatments can have harmful effects on the sperm.

Using condoms also allows you to protect your partner, since some chemo drugs may be in your semen or vaginal fluid during and just after you get chemo. You should continue to use a condom for at least 1 week after your last chemo pill.

**Handwashing**

Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling oral chemotherapy medications. Caregivers may wish to wear gloves when giving oral chemotherapy medications if they touch the medication.

**Laundry**

You or your caregiver should wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothing that has been soiled with your body waste. Soiled items should be kept in a plastic bag prior to being washed, and should be washed separately from the other laundry.

**FAQ:**

**Is it safe for my family to use the same toilet as I do?**

Yes. As long as anybody waste is cleaned from the toilet.

**What should I do if I do not have control of my bladder or bowels?**

Use a disposable, plastic-backed pad, diaper, or sheet to absorb urine or stool. Change it immediately when soiled and wash skin with soap and water. If you have an ostomy, your caregiver should wear gloves when emptying or changing appliances.

**What if I use a bedpan, urinal, or commode?**

You or your caregiver should wear gloves when emptying the wastes. Rinse the container with water after each use, and wash it with soap and water at least once a day.

**What if I vomit?**

You or your caregiver should wear gloves when emptying the basin. Rinse it with water after each use. Wash the basin at least once a day with soap and water.

**Is it safe to dispose of chemotherapy in the trash?**

Normally, you will not have extra oral chemotherapy medicine, but if you do, take advantage of a community drug take-back programs, or contact your pharmacy. When bringing your medication to a community drop-off, leave them in the original container, black out your name, and place in a zip-lock bag. For questions, you can call the Ramsey County Medication Collection Program at 651-633-EASY or the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency at 800-657-3864.