
Taking an oral anti-cancer medicine

Patient Information

Please read this leaflet before taking your oral anti-cancer medicine

Introduction

Oral anti-cancer medicines are given by mouth in the form of tablets, capsules or liquids.

This leaflet provides information for patients and carers on how to handle and take your oral anti-cancer medicine safely.

We will give you information about the particular medicine your doctor has prescribed.

What is an anti-cancer medicine?

An anti-cancer medicine is a treatment for cancer. There are many different types depending on the type of cancer you have. They may be traditional chemotherapy medicines (these medicines can damage normal cells in the body as well as the cancer cells) or targeted agents (these medicines work by aiming at the unusual parts of cancer cells and are less likely to damage normal cells).

Storage

Store the tablets/capsules in the container provided and at the recommended storage temperature on the label.

Keep all medicines in a safe place out of reach and sight of children and pets.

How to take the medicine

These medicines have been prescribed for your use only and should not be given to anyone else.

Always **check the dose** before taking on the medication's label. You may need more than one type of medicine or to combine tablets/capsules of different strengths to make the dose you need.

It is important to take your medication at the scheduled time and for the length of time instructed. Some medicines are taken continuously; others are taken with planned breaks, so there may be days when you will not take the medicines. It is important that you know when to start and stop your medicines. Follow the instructions on the medicine label. If in doubt contact your chemotherapy nurse, specialist cancer pharmacist or doctor whose contact numbers are on the back of this sheet.

Check the label on your medication for any special instructions about taking it with or without food or foods to avoid.

**Swallow your medication whole.
Do not chew, break or open capsules.**

If you are unable to swallow the medicine, talk to your chemotherapy nurse or specialist cancer pharmacist about other ways you can take the medication.

You should only dissolve chemotherapy tablets or open these capsules if you have been given advice on how to do this safely by a chemotherapy nurse, specialist cancer pharmacist or doctor.

If you are sick after taking a dose, do not repeat the dose and take your next dose at the normal time. If this happens again, contact your chemotherapy nurse/24 hour advice line.

If you miss a dose, do **not** try and catch up or double the next dose. Take the next dose as usual. Left over tablets/capsules from missed doses should be brought back to your doctor or pharmacy. Do **not** add left over doses onto the end of your treatment.

If you are taking any prescribed medicine, over the counter medicine, vitamin or a supplement, you should inform your medical team.

Any side effects should be reported to chemotherapy nurse or doctor. Particular attention should be paid to any side effects or symptoms described on your '*chemotherapy alert card*' where you should seek urgent medical advice.

Safe handling

Please check that tablets/capsules are not damaged before taking them out of the container. If tablets /capsules are broken or capsules containing liquid are leaking then contact your hospital pharmacy.

Relatives/carers should wear disposable gloves to handle these drugs to avoid contact with the skin. If in a blister pack, the medicine can be pushed out into a medicine pot/small cup instead of wearing gloves.

Wash hands thoroughly after taking/giving the oral chemotherapy.

Your chemotherapy drugs should not be handled by anyone who is pregnant or planning a pregnancy **unless you are taking on the advice of your medical team.**

The hospital will supply any further cycles of your anti-cancer tablets or capsules. Do not ask for further supplies from your GP.

If you have medicines left over, please return them to the hospital pharmacy. Do not flush or throw them away.

In order to reduce waste, and if you are continuing treatment, we may ask to re-schedule your next hospital visit if you have sufficient supplies at home or re-issue them in your next supply. This is particularly important if you have been prescribed a high cost medicine.

If you have any concerns or questions

Contact your chemotherapy nurse if you develop any unexpected/uncontrolled side effects.

If you have any specific queries about your medicine, please refer to the Patient Information Leaflet included in the pack with the medicine or ask your doctor, chemotherapy nurse or specialist cancer pharmacist for advice.

If you are unable to swallow these tablets/capsules you will be also be given one of the following factsheets if appropriate for the medicine:

- Dissolving an oral anti-cancer tablet safely
- Opening an oral anti-cancer capsule safely
- Giving an oral anti-cancer medicine through a feeding tube
- Giving an anti-cancer syringe by mouth

If after reading this information sheet you have any questions or concerns please ring us on our direct line:

References

This leaflet has been written by pharmacy and nursing staff for all hospital Trusts within London Cancer Alliance.

This information sheet is based on best practice and expert opinion.

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