

## Oral Chemotherapy Guide

### What Is Oral Chemotherapy?

“Oral chemotherapy” is treatment with anticancer drugs that are swallowed in tablet, capsule, or liquid form. It may be prescribed to control the spread of certain types of cancer, or to relieve some of the symptoms.

Oral chemotherapies are being approved as treatments for more and more types of cancer. For some types of cancer, studies have shown oral chemotherapy to be as effective and as safe as cancer treatments given through IV, injection, or a catheter. By finding out more about oral chemotherapy, you will be better prepared to discuss all treatment options with your doctor.

Many patients prefer the convenience of taking a tablet or capsule to other methods. One advantage of oral chemotherapy is less time traveling to your doctor’s office, which may give you more time for yourself.

Oral chemotherapy also requires you to take on additional responsibilities for your care. Because you take oral chemotherapy at home instead of at a doctor’s office, you become a more active member of your healthcare team.

### Your Role in Treatment

The decision to prescribe oral chemotherapy is made by your doctor, who will recommend the most appropriate treatment for your type of cancer. Your doctor’s decision to prescribe oral chemotherapy depends, in part, on whether you are able to play a key role in your own care. There are specific reasons why some patients are better suited for oral chemotherapy.

#### Oral chemotherapy patients must:

- understand when and how to take their medication
- be reliable and willing to give feedback to the members of their healthcare team
- be able to monitor how they are feeling
- promptly report any side effects
- keep scheduled appointments for office visits, blood draws, and testing

It is critical not only that you take your medication on schedule, but that you also keep a record of all the side effects you experience throughout the treatment, and report them to your healthcare team. There are valuable tools to make monitoring easier (see the oral chemotherapy toolbox to the right).

The sooner you report side effects and any changes in how you are feeling, the sooner your oral chemotherapy treatment can be adjusted for maximum effectiveness. Good communication with your healthcare team keeps you at the optimal dosage so you get the most benefit with the least amount of risk.

### The Oral Chemotherapy Toolbox

Tools that can help you stay on your oral chemotherapy treatment plan include:

- special pillbox organizers
- automated telephone reminder systems
- calendars to help you record your doctor’s office appointments, your dosing schedule, and your laboratory tests



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### Maximizing Effectiveness and Safety

Together, you and your doctor will weigh the benefits of oral chemotherapy against the important new responsibilities you will be taking on.

Maximizing the safety of oral chemotherapy treatment can depend on you. With fewer visits to the doctor's office, you will be responsible for keeping to your treatment regimen. Forgetting to take your medicine, not taking it on time, and taking too little or too much are among the problems to watch out for. It is critical that your doctor is kept informed about how the drugs are making you feel so your dose can be fine-tuned for maximum results.

Like any form of chemotherapy, oral chemotherapy might not interact well with other medicines. Your doctor will need to know all the medicines you are taking before you begin your cancer treatment.

### Managing Side Effects

The drugs that kill cancer cells can also affect normal cells. It is the harm to these healthy cells that causes the side effects that can be brought on by all forms of chemotherapy. Like all forms of chemotherapy, the side effects of oral chemotherapy will vary depending on the drug and the dosage.

The side effects of oral chemotherapy are similar to those during IV chemotherapy treatment. Some of the most common are headache, nausea, and vomiting. The best way to maximize the safety of oral chemotherapy is to monitor and promptly report all the side effects, so your healthcare team can adjust the dosage for optimal effectiveness.

During oral chemotherapy, it's important to stay in close contact with your healthcare team. Keeping a daily diary of the side effects you experience may help you to remember important details when you give updates on your treatment progress. Look for a sample side effects diary at the end of this guide.

There are a number of other ways to manage side effects during oral chemotherapy. Your doctor or oncology nurse may have some suggestions.

### What's in Your Medicine Cabinet?

Bring in a complete list for your doctor to check.

Don't forget to include:

- over-the-counter pain relievers
- cold remedies
- antacids
- laxatives
- vitamins
- herbal treatments
- other supplements you may be taking



## Tips for Staying on Your Treatment Plan

The number of anticancer drugs approved for oral chemotherapy treatment is growing. And studies show that patients prefer taking chemotherapy as a tablet or capsule. Studies have also found that oral chemotherapy is as effective and as safe as IV chemotherapy for certain types of cancer. Depending on the type of cancer you have, and the amount of responsibility you can handle, it may be time to talk to your doctor about oral chemotherapy.

Here you will find some samples of valuable tools for people taking oral chemotherapy.

### Keeping a Contact List

Staying on your treatment plan is important for your medicine to work effectively. Regular communication with your healthcare team can make it easier to stay on your plan.

Communication is easier when you have a list of the members of your team on your refrigerator or beside your medicine cabinet for easy reference. You can see a sample below.

Healthcare Team Member	Name	Contact Information
Oncologist	_____	_____
Oncology Nurse	_____	_____
Surgeon	_____	_____
Pharmacist	_____	_____
Social Worker	_____	_____
Business Manager	_____	_____

### Tracking Your Dosage and Side Effects

Use a diary every day to record the time you take your oral chemotherapy tablet or capsule, how many tablets or capsules you take at one time, and any side effects you experience. Keeping a diary of side effects is a good way to remember important details when you are discussing your treatment with your doctor and other members of your healthcare team.




## Side Effects Diary

### Symbols to use

To keep track of how you are feeling for one month or more, print additional copies of this diary.

- D**—Diarrhea
- DS**—Dry skin
- Fa**—Fatigue
- Fe**—Fever
- HL**—Hair loss
- Hfs**—Hand-foot syndrome
- H**—Headache
- I**—Infection
- LC**—Lack of concentration
- LA**—Loss of appetite
- N**—Nausea
- S**—Sore mouth
- V**—Vomiting

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	<b>Felt Same</b>
	<b>Felt Worse</b>

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