

UNDERSTANDING ORAL CANCER THERAPY



A Patient Guide






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This booklet will help you learn about oral cancer medications - pills and capsules you take at home to treat cancer. You will find out how these medications work, how to take them safely, and how to manage side effects.

QuickRx Specialty Pharmacy is here to help you get the medications you need. We can help you find copay assistance programs to lower your costs.

 Call us: 917-830-2525

 www.quickrxspecialty.pharmacy



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WHAT IS ORAL CANCER THERAPY?



Oral cancer therapy refers to cancer-fighting medications that you take by mouth - usually as pills, capsules, or liquid. These medications allow you to receive cancer treatment at home instead of going to a clinic for IV infusions.

Think of it this way: Traditional chemotherapy is often given through an IV at a cancer center. Oral cancer medications work in similar ways, but you take them as pills at home. This gives you more control and flexibility, but it also means you have an important responsibility in your own treatment.

Key Terms to Know

Oral Oncology: Cancer medications taken by mouth.

Targeted Therapy: Medications that target specific parts of cancer cells.

Oral Chemotherapy: Traditional chemotherapy drugs in pill form.

Immunotherapy: Medications that help your immune system fight cancer (some are oral).

Hormone Therapy: Medications that block hormones that fuel certain cancers.

Adherence: Taking your medication exactly as prescribed - critical for cancer treatment.

References:

1. American Cancer Society. "Oral Chemotherapy." cancer.org.
2. National Cancer Institute. "Targeted Cancer Therapies." cancer.gov.

TYPES OF ORAL CANCER MEDICATIONS

<p>TARGETED THERAPIES</p>	<p>Attack specific proteins or genes in cancer cells:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKIs): imatinib (Gleevec), erlotinib (Tarceva), osimertinib (Tagrisso) • CDK4/6 inhibitors: palbociclib (Ibrance), ribociclib (Kisqali) • PARP inhibitors: olaparib (Lynparza), rucaparib (Rubraca) • BTK inhibitors: ibrutinib (Imbruvica), acalabrutinib (Calquence)
<p>ORAL CHEMOTHERAPY</p>	<p>Traditional chemo drugs in pill form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capecitabine (Xeloda) • Temozolomide (Temodar) • Cyclophosphamide • Etoposide
<p>HORMONE THERAPIES</p>	<p>Block hormones that fuel certain cancers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast cancer: tamoxifen, letrozole (Femara), anastrozole (Arimidex) • Prostate cancer: enzalutamide (Xtandi), abiraterone (Zytiga), apalutamide (Erleada)
<p>ORAL IMMUNOTHERAPIES</p>	<p>Help your immune system fight cancer (newer class):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some newer immunotherapy options are becoming available as pills

Important: Each medication has specific instructions. Always follow your doctor's directions for YOUR specific medication.

References:
1. National Cancer Institute. "Types of Cancer Treatment." cancer.gov.

HOW THESE MEDICATIONS WORK

Different oral cancer medications work in different ways:

Targeted Therapies

- Find and attack specific targets on cancer cells
- Block signals that tell cancer cells to grow
- Often cause fewer side effects than traditional chemo
- Work best when cancer has specific mutations

Oral Chemotherapy

- Kills fast-growing cells (including cancer cells)
- Works throughout the body
- May affect healthy fast-growing cells too

Hormone Therapy

- Blocks hormones that feed certain cancers
- Lowers hormone levels or blocks their effects
- Used for breast, prostate, and other hormone-sensitive cancers

Treatment Goals

Depending on your situation, oral cancer therapy may be used to:

- Cure cancer
- Shrink tumors before surgery
- Kill remaining cancer cells after surgery
- Control cancer that has spread
- Prevent cancer from coming back
- Relieve symptoms

References:

1. American Society of Clinical Oncology. "How Targeted Therapies Work." cancer.net.

TAKING YOUR MEDICATION SAFELY

Oral cancer medications are powerful. Taking them correctly is essential for your safety and treatment success.

Follow Instructions Exactly

- Take the exact dose prescribed
- Take it at the same time(s) every day
- Follow food instructions (with food, without food, or specific timing)
- Swallow whole unless told otherwise - don't crush, chew, or open capsules

With or Without Food?

Food can affect how well your body absorbs the medication:

- Some medications must be taken with food
- Some must be taken on an empty stomach
- Some have specific timing (1 hour before or 2 hours after meals)
- Follow YOUR medication's specific instructions

If You Miss a Dose

- Follow specific instructions for your medication
- Generally: take as soon as you remember if it's not too close to the next dose
- NEVER double up to make up for a missed dose
- Call your pharmacy or doctor if unsure

If You Vomit After Taking

- Do NOT take another dose unless instructed
- Call your doctor or pharmacist for guidance

References:

1. Oncology Nursing Society. "Oral Chemotherapy Safety." ons.org.

SAFE HANDLING AND STORAGE

Many oral cancer medications are hazardous. Protect yourself and others:

Safe Handling

- Wash hands before AND after handling medication
- Do not crush, break, or chew tablets/capsules
- If a pill is broken, do not touch with bare hands
- Caregivers should wear gloves when handling
- Pregnant or nursing women should not handle these medications

Storage

- Keep in original container with child-resistant cap
- Store at room temperature unless otherwise directed
- Keep away from children and pets
- Store away from food and other medications
- Keep away from heat and moisture

Body Fluid Precautions

For 48-72 hours after taking oral cancer medications:

- Flush toilet twice with lid closed after use
- Wash hands thoroughly after using bathroom
- Clean up spills of body fluids with gloves
- Wash soiled clothing and linens separately

Disposal

- Do NOT throw in regular trash or flush
- Return unused medication to pharmacy
- Ask about drug take-back programs

References:

1. NIOSH. "Hazardous Drug Handling." [cdc.gov/niosh](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh).

COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

Side effects vary by medication. Not everyone experiences all side effects.

<p>Digestive Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea and vomiting • Diarrhea or constipation • Loss of appetite • Mouth sores • Taste changes
<p>Fatigue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling very tired is one of the most common side effects • May affect your ability to work or do daily activities
<p>Skin and Hair Changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rash (common with targeted therapies) • Dry skin • Hand-foot syndrome (redness, swelling, pain on palms/soles) • Hair thinning or loss (less common than IV chemo)
<p>Blood Count Changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low white blood cells (increased infection risk) • Low red blood cells (anemia, fatigue) • Low platelets (bleeding/bruising risk)
<p>Other Common Side Effects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Muscle or joint aches • Swelling • High blood pressure (some medications)

Important: Report all side effects to your healthcare team. Many can be managed.

References:

1. American Cancer Society. "Managing Side Effects." cancer.org.

MANAGING SIDE EFFECTS

Many side effects can be managed. Tell your team about any problems.

Nausea

- Take anti-nausea medication as prescribed
- Eat small, frequent meals
- Avoid strong smells
- Try ginger tea or crackers

Diarrhea

- Stay hydrated - drink plenty of clear fluids
- Eat bland foods (BRAT: bananas, rice, applesauce, toast)
- Avoid dairy, caffeine, high-fiber foods
- Ask about anti-diarrheal medications

Mouth Sores

- Rinse with salt and baking soda solution
- Use soft toothbrush
- Avoid spicy, acidic, or rough foods
- Ask about prescription mouth rinses

Fatigue

- Plan rest periods
- Light exercise can actually help
- Prioritize important activities
- Accept help from others

Skin Problems

- Use gentle, fragrance-free products
- Moisturize frequently
- Protect skin from sun
- For hand-foot syndrome: use thick creams, avoid heat, wear soft shoes

References:

1. National Cancer Institute. "Side Effect Management." cancer.gov.

FOOD AND DRUG INTERACTIONS

What you eat and other medications can affect how your cancer medication works.

GRAPEFRUIT AND GRAPEFRUIT JUICE

AVOID with many oral cancer medications!

- Can increase medication levels dangerously
- Also avoid: Seville oranges, pomelos, tangelos
- Ask your pharmacist about your specific medication

Other Food Interactions

- Some medications must be taken with food
- Some must be taken on an empty stomach
- High-fat meals may affect absorption
- Alcohol may increase side effects

Drug Interactions

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about ALL:

- Prescription medications
- Over-the-counter medications (including pain relievers, antacids)
- Vitamins and supplements
- Herbal products (St. John's Wort is especially dangerous)

Common Problem Medications

- Antacids and acid reducers (may affect absorption)
- Blood thinners
- Certain antibiotics and antifungals
- Seizure medications
- St. John's Wort (can make cancer meds less effective)

Always check before taking anything new - even vitamins!

References:

1. FDA. "Grapefruit Juice and Medications." fda.gov.



ADHERENCE: WHY EVERY DOSE MATTERS

Taking your oral cancer medication exactly as prescribed is critical for treatment success.

Why Adherence Matters

- These medications only work if there's enough in your body
- Missing doses can let cancer grow
- Inconsistent dosing may lead to drug resistance
- Even missing 1-2 doses per month can affect outcomes

You Are Your Own Nurse

With IV chemo, a nurse ensures you get every dose. With oral medications, that responsibility is yours. This is empowering but also requires commitment.

Tips for Staying on Track

- Take medication at the same time every day
- Use a pill organizer
- Set phone alarms or reminders
- Link to daily routine (with breakfast, before bed)
- Keep a medication diary
- Refill before you run out

Common Barriers and Solutions

Side effects: Talk to your doctor - doses can often be adjusted

Cost: Ask about copay assistance programs (we can help!)

Forgetting: Use reminders and pill organizers

Feeling better: Continue taking even when you feel good

References:

1. Journal of Oncology Practice. "Oral Chemotherapy Adherence."

TIPS FOR TAKING YOUR MEDICATION



DO:

- Take exactly as prescribed - dose, time, with/without food
- Swallow whole unless told otherwise
- Wash hands before and after handling
- Keep all appointments and lab tests
- Report all side effects
- Tell all healthcare providers you're on cancer medication
- Refill on time - don't run out
- Store properly

Keep Track

- Use a medication diary or app
- Note when you take each dose
- Record side effects to discuss with your doctor

Questions? Call Us!

Your specialty pharmacy team is here to help. Don't hesitate to call with questions about your medication.



DON'T:

- Crush, chew, or break pills unless instructed
- Skip doses
- Double up if you miss a dose
- Share your medication with anyone
- Take other medications without checking first
- Eat grapefruit (with most cancer medications)
- Stop taking without talking to your doctor

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM IF:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe chest pain
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Severe allergic reaction
- Sudden confusion
- Severe abdominal pain

CALL YOUR ONCOLOGIST IF::

- Nausea or vomiting that won't stop
- Diarrhea (more than 4 loose stools/day)
- Unable to eat or drink for 24 hours
- Mouth sores that make eating difficult
- Signs of infection (fever, chills, cough)
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Severe fatigue
- Rash that is severe or spreading
- Yellowing of skin or eyes
- Dark urine or light-colored stool
- Swelling of hands, feet, or face
- Blood in urine, stool, or vomit
- Side effects that worry you



Keep your oncologist's emergency number with you at all times!

References:

1. American Cancer Society. "When to Call Your Cancer Team." cancer.org.

GLOSSARY

ADHERENCE	Taking medication exactly as prescribed
CHEMOTHERAPY	Medications that kill fast-growing cells
DRUG INTERACTION	When one medication affects how another works
HAND-FOOT SYNDROME	Redness, swelling, pain on palms and soles from some cancer drugs
HAZARDOUS DRUG	Medication that requires special handling precautions
HORMONE THERAPY	Treatment that blocks hormones feeding cancer
IMMUNOTHERAPY	Treatment that helps your immune system fight cancer
ONCOLOGIST	Doctor specializing in cancer treatment
ORAL ONCOLOGY	Cancer medications taken by mouth
TARGETED THERAPY	Medications that target specific parts of cancer cells
TKI	Tyrosine kinase inhibitor - a type of targeted therapy

RESOURCES

Learn More:

- American Cancer Society: cancer.org
- 24/7 Helpline: 1-800-227-2345
- National Cancer Institute: cancer.gov
- Cancer Support Community: cancersupportcommunity.org
- CancerCare: cancercares.org
- Leukemia & Lymphoma Society: lls.org
- Cancer Financial Assistance Coalition: cancerfac.org
- Chemocare: chemocare.com
- Patient Access Network Foundation: panfoundation.org

Copay Assistance:

Many manufacturers offer copay assistance. QuickRx can help you find programs to lower your costs. Call us!



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This booklet is for informational purposes only and is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Always consult your healthcare provider for diagnosis and treatment.

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