**What You Need to Know About Oral Chemotherapy**

**What is oral chemotherapy?**

* Oral chemotherapy is a cancer-fighting drug given by mouth in tablet, capsule, or liquid form.
  + It is prescribed by your doctor or nurse practitioner and has the same benefits and risks as chemotherapy given by infusion.
* Today, many cancer patients receive oral chemotherapy as a treatment. This method is sometimes easier than getting chemotherapy by infusion at the hospital or clinic because the medicine can be taken at home.
  + It's important to understand that these pills can be just as strong as the intravenous form of chemotherapy.

**Oral chemotherapy is a serious treatment.**

* When taking oral chemotherapy at home, it’s important that you understand special instructions, precautions, and side effects.
* Following these instructions will help you receive the most benefit from the drug.

**What information should you gather before you begin oral chemotherapy?**

* Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will give you instructions for how and when to take your oral chemotherapy.
  + Please follow instructions carefully.
  + Keep them close by for reference.
* Be familiar with both the trade name and generic name of the drug.
* Understand the dose and frequency of the drug.
  + Always double- and triple-check the dose before taking. You may need to take several pills of different strengths to make the total dose.
* Know the best time of day to take the drug.
* Understand whether you should be taking the drug *before* or *after* a meal or snack.
* Review all other medicines or supplements you take with a member of your oncology team.
  + Some medications can interfere with how well the oral chemotherapy works.

**Communicate with your other health care providers.**

* Be sure your primary care physician, dentist, and other caregivers are informed about the oral chemotherapy you are taking.

**Prepare for your start date:**

* Find out if your oral chemotherapy can be filled at your local pharmacy or will be ordered by mail.
* Allow enough time for your prescription to be filled.
  + Have it on hand before your intended start date.
* Talk with your oncology team in advance, if you have concerns.

**Oral chemotherapy can be costly, so:**

* Check with your insurance company regarding your coverage and co-payments for oral chemotherapy.

**How to take your drug:**

* Have a system to make sure you take your medication
  + Calendar or daily medication checklist
  + Pill boxes with multiple compartments
  + Electronic reminders (alarms on clocks, smart phone applications, electronic pill boxes)
  + Medication dispensing machines).
* Plan ahead for travel, weekends, and refills.
* Swallow each tablet or capsule whole. Do not break, crush, or chew.
* Prepare your drug away from food and food prep areas.
* 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 are unable to swallow the pill, speak with your nurse or pharmacist about other ways to take your medication.
* If you vomit or throw up your medication, call your physician or nurse for further instructions.
* Wash your hands after taking the medication. Avoid handling crushed or broken pills (tablets or capsules). If others handle your oral chemotherapy medication, they should wear gloves while handling it.
* Carry your list of medications (that includes your cancer medications) with you.

**Storage**

* Most oral chemotherapy medicine is stored at room temperature, away from excess heat and moisture.
  + Too much heat or moisture may break down the pills or tables and make them less effective.
    - Do not store oral chemotherapy pills in a bathroom with a shower, or on your windowsill.
  + We will let you know if the medication you are taking needs special storage or handling.
* Keep this medicine in its original container, in a safe place, away from other family medications.
* Keep all medications out of the reach of children and pets.
* If you have unused oral chemotherapy pills (tablets or capsules), please return them to a pharmacy return bin.
  + Do not flush down the toilet, dump in the sink, or throw away in the trash.

**Safe handling of body waste in the home after chemotherapy**

* Chemotherapy stays in the body for hours or even days, and is found in vomit, urine, stool, and sweat (body wastes).
  + Special care must be taken to prevent your body waste from coming into accidental contact with you or your caregiver.
* Body wastes
  + Patient and caregiver:
    - You can use the toilet (septic tank or city sewage) as usual. There is no research to support double flushing to prevent accidental contact (although this may be suggested for certain medications).
    - Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet.
      * If urine, vomit, or stool gets on your body, wash with soap and water.
      * Always wear gloves when cleaning equipment or disposing waste from a urinal or commode.
    - Pregnant caregivers should not handle patient body waste.
  + Laundry
    - Always wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes that have been soiled with body waste.
    - Soiled items should be kept and washed separately from the other laundry.

**Questions and answers:**

* Is it safe for my family to use the same toilet as I do?
  + Yes, as long as all body waste is cleaned from the toilet.
* What should I do if I do not have control of my bladder or bowels?
  + To absorb urine or stool, use a disposable, plastic-backed pad, diaper, or sheet. Change it immediately when soiled. Then wash skin with soap and water.