



- **How and when to take it.** You should have clear instructions on how much and when to take your chemo. You need to take the exact dosage, at the exact right time, for exactly as long as you're supposed to do so. Oral chemo doses are set up so that the same level of drug stays in your body to kill the cancer cells. Not taking your chemo the right way can affect how well it works. Sometimes dose changes are needed, but don't make any changes unless your doctor tells you to do so. If you miss a dose or are late taking one, tell your doctor or nurse about it. They need to know about this when deciding if treatment is working. It may also help the doctor decide whether to change how much of the medicine you take or when you take it.
- **Special handling.** Chemo you swallow is as strong as other forms of chemo. Many are also considered hazardous. There are usually special precautions for storing and handling chemo drugs. You might be told to be careful not to let others come into contact with it or your body fluids while taking it and for a time after taking it. Sometimes you need to wear gloves when touching the pills or capsules. Some drugs have to be kept in the bottle or box they came in. And some drugs and the packages they come in need to be disposed of in a certain way. Some might have to be taken back to the drug store to be thrown away safely. To learn more, see [Chemotherapy Safety](#)<sup>3</sup>.
- **Cost.** Oral chemo drugs can be expensive. Make sure you ask your doctor about the cost of your treatment so you are not surprised when you get to the pharmacy or when you get your bill if the treatment is not available at pharmacies. Depending on the type of drug, some insurances don't cover the full cost, or may not cover it at all. Sometimes you can get assistance but many people have to pay more of their own money for them than what they would pay for chemo that's given with a needle in the hospital or clinic. If you have [health insurance](#)<sup>4</sup>, this might mean a higher co-pay. Make sure you know how much you'll have to pay for each treatment. You can call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 for more information about financial assistance.

Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any problems you have taking 0 g 1 0 0 1oT 1272 Tm 0 0 0 r

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## What can I expect from oral or topical chemo?

The [side effects](#)<sup>9</sup> of any form of chemo vary from drug to drug and from person to person. Your cancer care team may not be able to tell you what side effects you'll have, but they can tell you what to watch for.

Telling your team about side effects as soon as they happen can help make sure that they don't get too bad. Your doctor may have to change how much you take or give you other drugs to help you feel better. If you aren't sure about a side effect and can't reach your doctor, don't take your chemo until you talk to someone on your cancer care team.

Taking chemo at home gives you more freedom without having a lot of treatment visits. You may not be seeing your doctor and nurses very often, but be sure to call them with any questions or concerns you have.

## Are you ready to start your oral or topical chemo?

Here are some things you may want to talk to your cancer care team about when starting oral or topical chemo:

- What's the name of the chemo? Is there more than one name for the same drug?
- How do I use it or take it?
- When should I use it or take it?
- Is it safe to take it with other drugs, food, vitamins, herbs, supplements, skin lotions, or other treatments I use?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- How should I store it?
- Is there a special way it needs to be handled to protect me and others?
- What do you expect it to do?
- What are the likely side effects? What should I do if I have side effects?
- How can I get in touch with you if I have trouble late at night or on the weekend?
- How long will I need to take the chemo?
- Will my insurance pay for my chemo? If not, how much will it cost? How will I pay for it?
- Will my other health problems stop me from being able to take the chemo the way I should? Is there a chance my other health problems could make me forget to take my chemo?
- Will you be calling me to find out how I'm doing with the chemo?
- How often will you need to see me in person?

For **oral chemo**, be sure to also ask about certain questions about the pills, such as:

- What if I have trouble swallowing or keeping down the pills?
- Can they be opened, broken, or crushed?
- Can I mix it with food or liquid to take it?

Before starting chemo, talk to your doctor or nurse about any concerns or questions you have. **Get answers to all of your questions about chemo before you start taking it.**

The success of chemo taken at home really depends a lot on you – it's important to take the right dose of the drug, at the right time, just as you've been told. Your cancer care team is there to help you do this.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy/chemotherapy-safety.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy/chemotherapy-safety.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/financial-insurance-matters/understanding-health-insurance.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/financial-insurance-matters/understanding-health-insurance.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy/chemotherapy-safety.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy/chemotherapy-safety.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests/understanding-your-lab-test-results.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests/understanding-your-lab-test-results.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests/imaging-tests/imaging-radiology-tests-for-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/tests/imaging-tests/imaging-radiology-tests-for-cancer.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html)

## References

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Olsen MM, Naseman RW. Chemotherapy. In Olsen MM, LeFebvre KB, Brassil KJ, eds. *Chemotherapy and Immunotherapy Guidelines and Recommendations for Practice*. Pittsburgh, PA: Oncology Nursing Society; 2019:61-90.

Oncology Nursing Society (ONS). *Toolkit for Safe Handling of Hazardous Drugs for Nurses in Oncology*. Accessed at [https://www.ons.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/ONS\\_Safe\\_Handling\\_Toolkit\\_0.pdf](https://www.ons.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/ONS_Safe_Handling_Toolkit_0.pdf) on November 5, 2019.

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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as editors and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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