

Oral Anti-cancer Medication Safety at Home

Oral anti-cancer medications are used to treat cancer and are given by mouth. This includes oral chemotherapy, targeted treatments, and some hormonal medications. You or others can be exposed to anti-cancer medications by touching these pills. The pills need to be handled safely even though the risk is low. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should avoid handling anti-cancer medications.

How do I handle anti-cancer pills or capsules?

For the patient:

- ✓ Wash your hands before and after handling your medication.
- ✓ Keep your hands away from your eyes when handling anti-cancer pills. If you accidentally touch your eye, flush the eye well with lukewarm tap water.

For caregivers and family members:

- ✓ Do not pick up anti-cancer pills or capsules with your bare hands. Wear disposable gloves, if possible. If you cannot wear disposable gloves, tap the medication from the bottle into a small cup, spoon, or the cap from the bottle.
- ✓ Wash your hands before and after handling anti-cancer pills - even if you wore gloves.
- ✓ If you drop a pill or capsule, pick it up with a glove or tissue and follow the safe disposal instructions below. Let your cancer team know.

How do I take my oral anti-cancer medication?

It is important to take your anti-cancer pills exactly as your doctor has instructed.

- ✓ Take your medication by mouth. Swallow each tablet or capsule whole. Do not crush, chew, or cut your anti-cancer pills and do not open capsules.
- ✓ Use a calendar to remind you to take your anti-cancer medication on the right day.
- ✓ Use an alarm to remind you to take your anti-cancer pills at the right time of day.
- ✓ Ask if you need to take your anti-cancer pills on an empty stomach or with food.

What if I miss a dose?

- ✓ If you miss taking one of your anti-cancer pills, the Medication Information Sheet you were given may tell you what to do. Read information under the Heading “How it is given”. If there are no instructions or you still have questions, please call the clinic.
- ✓ If you vomit within 30 minutes of taking your pill call the clinic.
DO NOT TAKE AN EXTRA DOSE.

What if I take too many pills by mistake?

- ✓ Contact your doctor or nurse immediately.

How do I store my anti-cancer medication?

- ✓ Keep your pills away from sunlight, in a cool, dry place (unless you are told differently).
- ✓ Keep your anti-cancer pills in the original bottle or blister pack. Do not put them in containers with other medicines. If a pill reminder box must be used, put **ONLY** your anti-cancer medication in it.
- ✓ Store anti-cancer medication in an area free from moisture and extreme temperature (e.g. Do not store in the bathroom or in the kitchen . These are rooms that have too much moisture in them).
- ✓ Keep your anti-cancer pills away from children and pets.

How do I safely dispose of anti-cancer pills?

- ✓ Seal any unused, damaged or expired pills in a re-sealable bag and return them to your pharmacy for safe disposal.
- ✗ **DO NOT** throw in the regular garbage
- ✗ **DO NOT** flush down the toilet
- ✗ **DO NOT** flush down the sink

What if a child/pet swallows my anti-cancer pills by accident?

- ✓ **Take the child** and the pill bottle to the nearest hospital emergency room right away!
- ✓ **If a pet** swallows your anti-cancer pills call your veterinarian.

Walker Family Cancer Centre

Call: 905-682-6451

Monday – Friday 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM (*Phones not answered between 12 and 1 PM*)

After Hours Call: 905-685-8082



The information in this handout has been developed by the team at Walker Family Cancer Centre using resources from Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre and Cancer Care Ontario. Revised December 2018.

