

Patient fact sheet

Information on anti-cancer medicines taken as tablets, capsules or liquids



Your doctor has prescribed a cancer treatment that you will take by mouth. This may be as a capsule, tablet or liquid and includes therapies such as chemotherapy, targeted therapy, hormonal therapy and immunomodulators. Oral anti-cancer medicine can be just as strong as medicine given into a vein. It is important to take your medicine correctly and to follow some safety precautions at home.

What should I know about my treatment?

It is important to take your medicines exactly the way your doctor or nurse tells you to.

- A written plan telling you when to start and stop taking your medicine is a good idea.
- Never take your medicine for longer than you have been told to.
- If you do not understand how or when to take your medicine, do not start taking it until you speak with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
- Before you start your treatment, discuss any concerns or questions you have with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.
- Get answers to all of your questions about your treatment before you start taking it.

Learn how to take your temperature

- Make sure you have a working thermometer at home
- Ask your doctor or nurse the right way to take your temperature.

REMEMBER: If your temperature is 38°C or higher contact your doctor or nurse immediately, or go to the hospital emergency department.

You can sometimes have an infection without a temperature. Always contact your doctor or nurse if you feel unwell.

Why is safety important?

Anti-cancer medicines can affect other people who come in contact with them.

If you have oral anti-cancer medicines at home you should know:

- how to store and handle your medicine safely
- when the medicine could be in your body fluids (e.g. urine, vomit, faeces, semen)
- how to clean up body fluids safely.

Taking oral anti-cancer medicines at home

What should I know about taking my tablets or capsules?

- Swallow the tablets or capsules whole (never crush, chew or bite tablets and do not open capsules or dissolve tablets unless directed to by your doctor).
- If you cannot swallow or tolerate your tablets or capsules contact your doctor or pharmacist.
- Make sure you understand if your medicines need to be taken with food or on an empty stomach.
- Wash your hands after handling these medicines.
- Make sure your carer does not handle your medicines (they should wear gloves if they need to touch the tablets or capsules).

What happens if I forget to take my dose?

- Take your next dose at the normal time or as directed by your doctor.
- Tell your doctor, nurse or pharmacist at your next appointment if you have missed taking your tablets or capsules.

What happens if I vomit after taking my dose?

- If you vomit directly after taking your medicine, do not take a replacement dose.
- Take your next dose at the normal time.
- If you have been given medicines to prevent nausea and vomiting, take this as prescribed.
- If this does not stop you from vomiting, speak with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.
- You should inform your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have vomited after a dose of your cancer treatment.

How should I store my medicines?

- Most medicines are stored at room temperature, away from excess heat and moisture.
- You will be told if the medicine you are taking needs special storage.
- Keep medicines in its original container, in a safe place, away from other family medicines.
- All medicines need to be kept out of the reach of children and pets.

What if I have tablets or capsules left?

- If you have unused tablets or capsules, please return them to the pharmacy.
- Do not flush them down the toilet, wash them down the sink, or throw them in the bin.

Medical emergency:

Some side effects of oral anti-cancer medicines can be very serious. It is important that you do not wait until the next morning (or after the weekend) to get help.

Contact your treating team immediately, if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- a temperature of 38°C or higher
- chest pain
- chills, shivers or shakes
- gum or nose bleeds, or unusual bleeding (if bleeding doesn't stop after ten minutes of ice and pressure)
- pain, burning or blood in urine
- vomiting (that continues despite taking your anti-sickness medication)
- diarrhoea (e.g. four or more bowel movements than usual and/or diarrhoea at night)
- difficulty breathing.

If you can't contact your treating team, go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

Anti-cancer medicine safety at home

It can take up to a week after your last dose of anti-cancer medicine for your body to get rid of the medicine. Most medicines are passed out of the body in your urine or faeces (bowel motion). When anti-cancer medicines are in your body, a small amount of it can also be in your body fluids. For example, it can be in your urine and faeces, in your vomit if you are sick, and in other body fluids.

Useful tips

Getting help and support

- Know how to contact your doctor or nurse, or the hospital, for help and advice.
- Find out where to get advice about practical issues, like money problems.
- Find out where to get support if you are feeling anxious or depressed.
- Ask where you can get help if you need extra support, for example if you live alone or you have to travel for your treatment.

Anti-cancer medicines and infection

- Learn how to reduce your risk of infection.
- Know you should call your doctor or nurse immediately if your temperature is 38°C or more, or you have other signs of infection.

Anti-cancer medicines safety

- Find out what safety precautions you should take at home during your treatment.

Treatment side effects

- Ask about any side effects you might get and how to manage them.

For more information see the [Patient Information sheets](#) at www.eviq.org.au. These sheets are available in English and 9 other languages, and include information on:

- [Chemotherapy safety at home](#)
- [Common questions about chemotherapy](#)
- [Managing the side effects of chemotherapy](#)
- [Diarrhoea during cancer treatment](#)
- [Infection during cancer treatment](#)
- [Mouth problems during cancer treatment](#)
- [Nausea and vomiting during cancer treatment](#)



Remember, talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions!

What are the best safety precautions?

Anti-cancer medicines are classified as hazardous substances and can be in your bodily fluids for **up to 7 days** after each treatment cycle or longer if you have been taking your medication on a daily basis. You should be careful during this time. Your pharmacist should advise if these precautions are necessary, specific to the medicine you are taking.

Wear gloves to clean up body fluids. Always wash your hands afterwards.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use disposable cloths • Wash down any surfaces with soapy water
Cleaning up spills of body fluid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the used cloths in a plastic bag and tie it up • Put this bag inside another plastic bag and tie that up. This is called 'double bagging' • Throw the bags in the bin
Getting rid of other body fluids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Double bag' any incontinence pads, nappies, catheter bags or stoma bags, before throwing them away
Washing clothing or bedding with body fluids on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash any clothing or bedding straight away • Wash them separately on a long washing machine cycle
Vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a plastic bowl, or a plastic bag with no holes (and 'double bag') • If you use a bowl, wash it out with soap and water afterwards. Don't use it for anything else. Throw it out when your treatment has finished
Going to the toilet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit down to use the toilet • Close the lid afterwards • Flush using a full flush
Having sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a condom to protect your partner from your body fluids • Pregnancy should be avoided during, and for a period after, anti-cancer drug treatment. Use a reliable form of contraception as some anti-cancer drugs can harm an unborn baby.

Common questions

Will I get side effects?

Side effects from anti-cancer medicines vary from medicine to medicine and from person to person. Your doctor or nurse may not be able to predict what side effects you will have, but they can give you an idea of what to watch out for.

Make sure you know what side effects to look for before you start your treatment. Also ask if there are any side effects that you should call your doctor or nurse about right away.

Your doctor may prescribe other medicines to help with anti-cancer side effects. There are also many things that you can do to help yourself.

Will I still need to see my doctor?

Even though you take your cancer treatment at home, you will still need to see your healthcare team. They will watch for changes in the cancer and see how you are doing with your cancer treatment plan.

You should be given printed information about your anti-cancer medication, including information about:

- how to recognise the possible side effects of the medication
- how to prevent or manage these side effects at home
- when to contact your treating team or attend hospital.

Remember

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your treatment

Contact numbers:

Daytime: _____

Night/weekend: _____

Can I take other medicines?

Medicines are any drugs or substances that can affect your body. They include medicines that your doctor gives you a prescription for, as well as medicines you can buy without a prescription, for example, over the counter medicines.

Some medicines are called complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs). They can include vitamins, dietary supplements, homeopathy, and traditional medicines, like Chinese, Ayurvedic or Aboriginal bush medicine. Some CAMs can interfere with your anticancer medicines.

It is important to tell your doctor or pharmacist about any medicines you are taking, including CAMs, before you start cancer treatment.

Don't stop or start any medicines without asking your doctor or pharmacist.

! Important

You should use a reliable method of contraception while undergoing cancer treatment and for a period of time after completing treatment because some anti-cancer drugs can harm an unborn baby. If you could be pregnant or planning parenthood, speak with your treating doctor for more information.

Anyone who is pregnant or breastfeeding **should not touch:**

- anti-cancer medications
- body fluids that may have anti-cancer medicines in them (e.g. vomit, urine, faeces).



For information for patient and carers please scan the QR code.