

# THIS IS **LIVING WITH CANCER**™

## *Managing your prescription medicines*

Whether you're newly diagnosed or have already started treatment, managing cancer and following a prescribed treatment plan can be daunting. Cancer treatment comes in many different forms. Each medicine may have its own set of considerations and instructions.

Being informed about what has been prescribed for you and always asking your healthcare team any questions you may have, can help you take a more active role in your treatment plan.

On the following pages we'll walk you through some important things to keep in mind throughout your treatment, especially when it comes to managing your medicines.



# Starting a new treatment plan

Before you begin a treatment for any condition, including cancer, you may have a number of questions for your healthcare team. Having a strong relationship with your healthcare team is a key part of your care. **You should feel comfortable asking any questions that may come up throughout your treatment.**



**It's important to ask the following questions, and others you may have, about each medicine you've been prescribed. These questions may vary, depending on the type of medicine you've been prescribed.**

*What is the name of the medicine and the dosage?*

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*How is the medicine given?*

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*When should I take the medicine?*

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*How often will I need to come in for treatment and/or tests?*

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*What side effects might I experience?*

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*What should I do if I have side effects?*

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*Are there any side effects that I should contact you about right away?*

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*How long will I need to take this medicine?*

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*What should I do if I miss a dose?*

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*How do I fill the prescription?*

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*Will I need to use a specialty pharmacy?*

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*How should I store the medicine?*

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*Could other medicines or supplements change the way the cancer treatment works?*

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**Let your healthcare team know about any new medicines or herbal supplements you are considering taking during the course of your cancer treatment.** You also need to inform your healthcare team if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to become pregnant. Before you begin any type of treatment, it's important to talk to your doctor about all your medical conditions to understand what's best for you.

# *Understanding different forms of treatment*

How you take your medicine will depend on what is prescribed for you. While your healthcare team should provide clear guidance and information, you should always voice any concerns before starting treatment.

## SOME OF THE WAYS CANCER MEDICINES ARE GIVEN INCLUDE:



**Orals**, which are swallowed in tablet, liquid or capsule forms



**Infusions**, which deliver medicine directly into a vein (intravenous)



**Injections**, which put the medicine into a muscle or under the skin (intramuscular or subcutaneous)



Ask questions, voice any concerns and don't hesitate to get in touch with your healthcare team if there's anything you're unsure of. Remember, your healthcare team is here for you and wants you to be comfortable with your treatment plan. **If you need to stop taking your medicine for any reason, always talk to your healthcare team first.**

## ORAL THERAPY

**Oral medicines are treatments that are taken by mouth.** They include tablets, capsules or liquids. Oral medicines can **usually be taken at home.** It's important to take the right dose of your oral medicine, at the right time, as prescribed by your doctor.



**Below are some common questions to ask your healthcare team before starting an oral therapy:**

*What if I have trouble swallowing or keeping the pills down?*

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*Are there any food and beverage restrictions?*

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*Can I still take the medicine if it is broken, crushed or the capsule is open?*

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*Is there a specific time I should take the medicine?*

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*Is it safe to take with other medicines, food, vitamins, herbal supplements or other treatments I use?*

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*How should the medicine be stored? Is there a specific temperature it should be stored at?*

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## INTRAVENOUS (IV) THERAPY

**Some cancer drugs are infused right into your bloodstream.** This is called intravenous or IV treatment. With this method, a soft plastic tube, called a catheter, is **inserted directly into your vein.**

A catheter can be inserted into one of your smaller veins in your arms or hands. A central catheter can be placed into a bigger vein in your chest. Your healthcare team will discuss which is most appropriate for you.

Depending on the plan that you and your doctor have developed, your IV infusion can last for less than an hour or can be given continuously over the course of several days. IV treatments are **typically given at a clinic or during your stay in the hospital.** A smaller number of these treatments may be given in your home.



## INTRAMUSCULAR THERAPY AND SUBCUTANEOUS INJECTIONS

**Intramuscular therapy is an injection that puts the medicine directly into a muscle.** This type of injection allows for the medicine to be absorbed into the bloodstream quickly. **Muscle tissue can hold a larger amount of medicine** than the tissue just under the skin. A common example of an intramuscular injection is a flu shot.

Subcutaneous injections are given just under the skin, using a short needle. The medicine is injected between the tissue layer of the skin and the muscle. Insulin is commonly given as a subcutaneous injection.

# Knowing what to expect with side effects

It's natural to worry about the side effects of your cancer therapy. But it's important to remember that your healthcare team has your best interest in mind as you explore treatment options together. Your doctor puts careful consideration into how much cancer medicine you take. The dosage needs to be effective while managing side effects, which can be different for each person.

**Be sure to talk to your healthcare team about the possible side effects of your treatments,** how long they might last and what you should do if you experience them. In certain cases, you may be given medicine to help prevent some of them before they happen or to help relieve certain side effects.

## UNDERSTANDING SIDE EFFECTS

When talking to your healthcare team, you should **carefully review the patient information leaflet, if available**, for all of your medicines to discuss the most common and serious side effects. This is typically found on the last page of the leaflet. Some side effects may be mild and can be discussed the next day or at your next appointment, while other side effects can be very serious.

### EXAMPLES OF SIDE EFFECTS THAT MAY REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION:

- A fever of 100.5°F or greater
- Bleeding or unexplained bruising
- Intense chills
- Bloody urine or stool
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Unusual pain, including headaches
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Pain or soreness at injection or catheter site
- A rash or signs of an allergic reaction, like swelling of the mouth or throat, severe itching or trouble swallowing; dizziness; shortness of breath or hives (raised itchy skin welts)

**KEEP IN MIND THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE LIST.**

Always call your healthcare team for medical advice about side effects. **If there are any signs of an allergic reaction after taking any medicine, call 911 immediately before calling your healthcare team.**

It's helpful to keep the poison control center's phone number nearby for emergencies. If you think you have taken too much of your medicine (overdose), call the American Association of Poison Control Centers at **1-800-222-1222**, contact your local poison control center or seek medical care right away. Inform them what medicine was taken, how much and when.

You are encouraged to report side effects to the **FDA** by calling **1-800-FDA-1088** or by visiting **[fda.gov/medwatch](https://www.fda.gov/medwatch)**.

## *Managing possible interactions*

Many medicines can affect one another. Taking two medicines at the same time may affect how each medicine works, so it's important to have an updated list that includes all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements that you are taking.

Remember to update this list when things change (for example, if you start or stop taking something). **It's important to bring this list to all your doctor appointments**—including with primary care physicians, dentists and other specialists—not just those specific to your cancer treatment. **It's critical that caregivers are aware of everything that you take, too.**

### **BELOW ARE SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND THAT MAY AFFECT THE WAY YOUR CANCER MEDICINE WORKS OR HOW SIDE EFFECTS OCCUR:**

- **Know if you should take it with or without food.** Some oral cancer medicines need to be taken on an empty stomach, while others need to be taken with food
- **Be aware that certain foods should be avoided.** Grapefruit or grapefruit juice commonly affects how your body absorbs and reacts to certain medicines
- **Ask if you should avoid any particular over-the-counter medicines, vitamins or herbal supplements.** Some may make the cancer medicine less effective
- **Ask if there is a specific time frame for taking your additional medicines along with your prescribed cancer medicine**

## *Taking your medicine as prescribed*

A lot of medical research goes into determining the best way for a medicine to be given. So it's important that you **take your medicine exactly as prescribed by your healthcare team**—this is called “adherence” or being “adherent.” Not taking your medicine properly can interfere with the medicine's ability to do its job.

However, sometimes things come up that may make it difficult for you to follow the instructions of your healthcare team. Clear and frequent communication is important. **If you are having trouble taking your medicine exactly as prescribed, let your healthcare team know right away so they can help.**

### **IT'S ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM IF YOU ARE:**

- **Having any new or worsening symptoms**
- **Experiencing side effects**
- **Having trouble following the prescribed dosing schedule**
- **Facing challenges getting or refilling the prescription**

Ask your healthcare team about the safety of using certain medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements throughout treatment.

# Staying on track with treatment

## FILLING YOUR PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES

### *The role of specialty pharmacies*

Prescriptions for many medicines may be filled by a specialty pharmacy. What's different about these types of pharmacies is that **they provide medicines that might not be available at typical neighborhood pharmacies**. Usually a specialty pharmacy will ship your medicine directly to your home.

#### **AS WITH ANY PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:**

- Let your healthcare team know when your shipment has arrived and when you start taking your medicine
- Take note of any changes in dosage—always check the instructions that come with your medicine when you receive your refill
- Tell your healthcare team, specialty pharmacy and local pharmacy about all of the medicines you're currently taking, including vitamins, herbal supplements and any over-the-counter medicines. Remember to update your team if there are any changes
- Know when you're due for a refill, and be on the lookout for a call from your specialty pharmacy to confirm your refill

## Storing and handling your medicines

There are a number of guidelines to follow about how to **properly store and handle your medicines**. If you are not sure how to store your medicine, check with your healthcare team or pharmacist, and refer to the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine.

#### **TIPS ON HOW TO PROPERLY STORE AND HANDLE YOUR MEDICINES:**

- Ask your healthcare team how you should organize your medicines—using pill boxes or keeping them in their original containers. Store these in a safe place
- Always keep medicines out of the reach of children and/or pets. Also, certain medicines should not be handled by anyone but the patient
- Check with your healthcare team or pharmacist before you cut or crush your pills
- If you use a pill box or other type of organizer, keep 1 for oral cancer medicines and 1 for any other medicines, and clearly label both boxes
- Some medicines require special storage or handling, such as refrigeration, while others may need to be kept at room temperature
- Ask your pharmacist how to properly dispose of any unused or expired medicine

While the list above applies to many medicines, your healthcare team can advise you based on your specific treatment. They will know what is best for your situation.

# Reminders to help you keep up with treatment

When managing your treatment, it may feel like there's a lot to keep track of. Below are a few suggestions that may help you take your medicine as prescribed and manage your refills. **Talk to your healthcare team about their recommendations on how to keep track of your prescribed medicine.**

## SET DAILY REMINDERS

Mobile phones are a popular, convenient way to remind you to take your pills. You can either use them to **set a reminder alarm, or use an app** specifically made to help you take your medicines. You can also use an alarm clock set to specific times each day.

## RELY ON REFILL REMINDERS

Remembering to take your medicines on schedule is going to be key in treating your cancer. **Make sure you have your cancer medicine on hand when you need it.** Work with your specialty pharmacy to make sure your refill shipments are set up.

## USE A PILL BOX

**Pill boxes or organizers can be helpful** to keep track of your daily or weekly medicine and can be one way to confirm that your medicine was taken.

### YOU MIGHT ALSO FIND IT HELPFUL TO:

- Write the date to refill on your calendar or planner
- Keep a journal to track your medicines so that you can refer to it at follow-up appointments with your healthcare team







## Keeping track of your medicines

**Before your week starts**, fill out the left-hand column with the names, dosages and how many times you take your medicines and supplements each day. You may also want to add in any instructions from your healthcare team, for example, whether a medicine should be taken with or without food. Then, during the week, check off the days you take them. Print out this page as many times as you need to keep track of your medicines each week.

**Is it difficult to stick to your schedule?** Let your healthcare team know. That way, you can come up with solutions together.

MEDICINE NAME & DOSAGE	S	M	T	W	T	F	S

**KEEP YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM UPDATED**  
Remember to ask your team about any new medicine or supplement you're considering. This way, they can make sure it will work well with your other treatments.