

## Oral Treatment Safety Guide

For patients taking oral medicine for cancer

You have been prescribed oral treatment for cancer. This means you take a tablet, capsule, pill or liquid by mouth to treat your cancer. You take this medicine at home. Please read this handout **before** starting treatment. It contains important safety guidelines.

### Getting started

Your cancer care team should give you a:

- Detailed information sheet about your medicine and possible side effects
- Cancer treatment education bag



**Call your cancer care team when your oral treatment arrives.**  
Confirm your start date and treatment schedule with them **before** you start taking your oral treatment.



The process to order and obtain your treatment can take at least 7 to 14 days. It often comes from a mail order or specialty pharmacy.



There are resources to help pay for the cost of oral treatment. Let us know if you need help.



Complete the checklist on page 2 before starting treatment.



## Complete this checklist before starting treatment

### Education

- Watch our video about oral treatment for cancer



Scan the QR code or visit [www.goemmi.com](http://www.goemmi.com) and enter the code **SCCORAL** to watch the video.

- Read the items in your education bag. Share the items, plus this handout, with your caregivers, family and friends.

### Planning ahead

- Make sure you have a thermometer that works. If you don't feel well, you need to check your temperature quickly to see if you have a fever.

Some cancer medicines can weaken your immune system and make it harder for your body to fight infections (sickness). You need to avoid infections and watch for signs of infection. Read the Infection and Low White Blood Cell Count section in the Drug Therapies for Cancer Guide. Share this info with your family and friends.

- Buy a box of nitrile gloves in case a family member or caregiver needs to help you take your oral treatment or handle body fluids.
- Ask your cancer care team which pharmacy will provide your treatment and how to get refills. Write the pharmacy name and number in a place that's easy to find.

### Questions

- Ask your cancer doctor if you need to see a dentist or get any vaccines.
- Write down your questions and talk with your doctor or nurse to get answers.

# Key things to know when taking oral treatment

Oral treatments for cancer are strong drugs. They can harm healthy cells and cancer cells. You must be careful when taking these medicines. Follow these guidelines:

## Follow your cancer doctor's orders

Take the exact amount of oral treatment that your cancer doctor prescribed. Not taking your medicine as prescribed may affect how well it works. Taking more than what is ordered may harm you. Taking less may not be enough to help.

As you respond to treatment, you may feel better. You may even feel that you don't need the treatment, but it is important that you keep taking it until your cancer doctor tells you to stop. If you stop taking your oral treatment for any reason, you must call and let your cancer doctor know as soon as you can.

## Basic safety

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds **before and after** taking your cancer treatment pills.
- It's best if you don't touch the pills with bare hands. If you can, tip pills from the bottle into the cap or open the dose-pack over a small disposable cup. Put the used cup into a trash can with a lid. Keep children and pets away from the trash.
- Swallow your cancer treatment pills whole. Do not crush, chew or cut them. Do not open capsules. If you cannot swallow the medicine, call your cancer care team.
- Use a system to make sure you take your cancer treatment pills at the right time. Try a cell phone alarm or reminder, calendar or timer. Use your phone or paper to keep track of when you took your medicine and any side effects.
- **Do not take an extra dose of your medicine.** Call your cancer doctor as soon as you can if you miss a dose or throw up after taking your treatment.



If someone else is giving your cancer treatment pills, see pages 9 and 10 for caregiver safety guidelines.

## Safe storage

- Store your treatment in the bottle or blister pack it came in. Do not put them in a pill reminder box unless your doctor, nurse or pharmacist tells you to do so.
- Store your medicine away from heat, sunlight and moisture. These can break down the pills and make them not work as well.
- Keep the medicine away from food and drinks, other medicines, children and pets.
- If your medicine must be refrigerated, keep it away from food and drinks and store in a zipper lock bag or empty food crisper drawer.

## Side effects

Side effects are problems caused by cancer treatment. Call and tell your cancer care team about any new or worsening side effects or concerns. **Do not ignore them.** The sooner you let them know, the better.

If you have questions about how to manage side effects, ask your doctor or nurse.

## Be prepared

Allow 5 to 7 days for refill requests. Don't wait until you are almost out. Plan ahead for travel and weekends.

Tell your other doctors, dentists or health care providers that you are taking oral treatment for cancer. Carry a list of all the medicines you take and include your cancer treatment. Also include on your list any vitamins, minerals, supplements and herbs, plus allergies and/or reactions to medicines.

Ask your cancer doctor if it's safe to take any vitamins, minerals, supplements or herbs. Some may interact with your treatment and cause unsafe side effects.

Tell your family or friends where you keep your medicine list, in case of an emergency.

## Labs and follow-up care

It is common to need lab blood draws before and during your treatment. Your cancer doctor may also refer you to other specialists or for testing to help monitor for side effects from treatment. Your follow-up care depends on which oral treatment you take.

## Getting rid of unused medicine

Don't throw out any unused drugs or flush them down the toilet. Call our cancer information service line at 1-800-641-2422 to see if there are UH locations that can take your medicine. If your treatment is part of a clinical trial, return it to your clinical trials nurse.

### Terms to know

**Dose** is how much medicine you take.

**Strength** is how much of the medicine (drug) is in each pill.

Oral treatment can come in different strengths, such as 50 mg and 100 mg (milligram) pills. You may need to take more than 1 pill to get the correct dose.



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Portions of this work have been adapted from your Oral cancer treatment care plan, with permission from Cancer Centre of Southeastern Ontario.

# Safe handling of body fluids at home

Small amounts of your cancer treatment medicines may be in your body fluids for several days. Examples of these body fluids include saliva, mucus, blood, urine (pee), bowel movements (poop), vomit and those from sex. Since these medicines can also harm healthy cells, it is best if you and other people aren't exposed to them. This handout lists safety measures to help prevent contact with your body fluids at home.



Follow these guidelines at all times, even if you take a break from your oral cancer treatment. When you are done taking all of your treatment, follow these guidelines for 7 days after your last dose.

## Basic guidelines for handling body fluids

- Try to handle your own body fluids when you can. You and your caregivers should wear nitrile gloves when cleaning up body fluids or items that hold body fluids such as soiled laundry or a basin for vomit.
- Don't let pregnant women or children touch body fluids or items that may contain these fluids.
- Wash hands with soap and water after wearing gloves or touching body fluids or soiled items. Don't use gloves with holes or tears.
- Turn gloves inside out when taking them off - try not to touch the outside of the gloves. Place used gloves in a sealed bag and throw away after one use. Wash hands with soap and water after gloves are off.



## In the bathroom

- Wash hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom. Don't touch other items or surfaces until after you wash your hands.
- If you can, use your own bathroom. If you can't use your own bathroom, wipe the toilet seat and rim with a sanitizing wipe after each use. After cleaning, wash your hands with soap and water before touching anything. 7 days after your last treatment, wash the toilet and bathroom floor.
- If you have a low flow toilet, put the lid down and flush the toilet twice. This helps make sure body waste isn't left in the toilet.
- Sit on the toilet to avoid splashing. Wear gloves when cleaning a bedpan or urinal, using soap and water after each use.



## Washing items soiled with body fluids

- Wash soiled items soiled with body fluids in a washing machine right away.
- Don't wash soiled items with other clothing. Put them through the wash cycle twice using hot water and detergent.
- If you don't have access to a washing machine, placed soiled items in a sealed plastic bag until you can wash them.
- If you can, handle your own soiled items. If other people touch them, they should wear gloves. Wash clothing or skin that comes in contact with soiled items.



## If you throw up

Wear gloves if you clean up vomit or empty a basin. Wash basin with soap and water after each use.

## If you don't have control of your bladder or bowels

Use throw-away plastic backed pads or diapers to absorb urine or bowel movements. Wear gloves and change them right away if they are soiled. Wash soiled skin gently with soap and water. Place soiled diapers, plastic-backed pads and gloves in their own bag before putting in the trash.

## Sex

After taking oral treatment for cancer, small amounts your medicines may be in vaginal fluid or semen. We do not know if these medicines can harm others. To help protect your partner, we recommend that you use a barrier during any type of sex.

## If you have an ostomy

Wear gloves when emptying or changing ostomy bags. Ostomy supplies that can be thrown away, such as bags or gloves, should be put in their own bag before putting them in the trash.

## Contact your cancer care team if you:

- Have trouble swallowing or keeping the cancer treatment pills in your stomach.
- Have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
- Feel too sick to take your medicine.
- Miss a dose or took an extra dose.
- Have any changes to the medicines you take, such as new prescriptions from other doctors.
- Are admitted to the hospital – even a UH hospital.
- Have side effects, questions, concerns or any problems listed on the Red Sheet. The Red Sheet is in your education bag, or you can find it online at [www.uhhospitals.org/seidmaneducation](http://www.uhhospitals.org/seidmaneducation)



**Call 911 for anything you think is a medical emergency**



# Caregiver safety

If someone is giving you your cancer treatment pills, they should:

- Wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds **before and after** giving you your pills.
- Wear nitrile gloves. See box below for more details.
- Carefully tip pills from the bottle or dose pack into a gloved hand or disposable cup.
- Remove gloves using the steps on page 10. Place used gloves and cup into a trash can with a lid.
- Read the **Safe handling of body fluids at home** section on pages 6 and 7.



Don't let children, or pregnant or breast feeding caregivers touch your cancer treatment pills.

Gloves help protect caregivers' skin from being exposed to cancer medicines.

Use nitrile gloves that are powder-free and latex-free.

Don't reuse gloves.



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This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice. Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.

# How to remove gloves

Turn the gloves inside out as you remove them, using these steps:

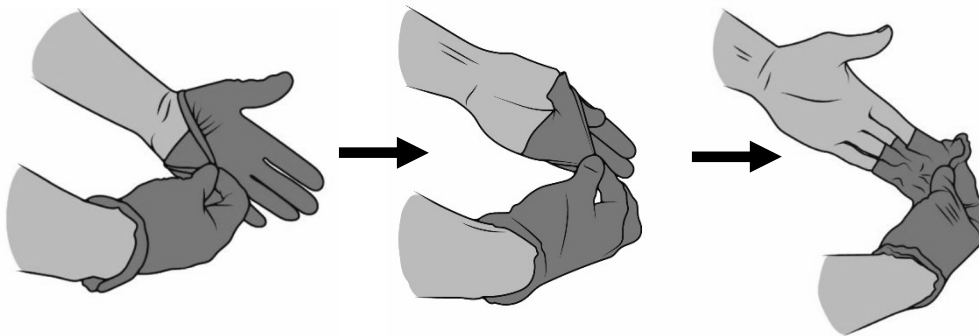
## Step 1

Grab the outside edge of 1 glove near the wrist.



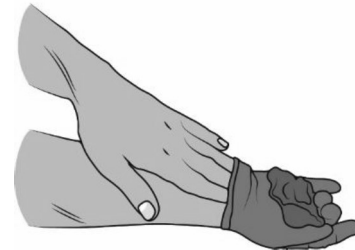
## Step 2

Pull and peel the glove away from the hand, so it is turned inside out once it is off.



## Step 3

Hold the removed glove in the gloved hand.  
Slide 1 or 2 fingers of the ungloved hand under the wrist of the other gloves.



## Step 4

Peel the glove off from the inside, making a bag for both gloves. Put gloves into a trash can with a lid. If you touched items with body fluids, place gloves in a sealed bag and then the trash.

Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water.  
Dry with clean paper towel.

