



What you need to know about medication safety

Before, during, and after treatment

A guide for new patients



While you are a patient at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at Londonderry you may receive medications to treat your illness. The doctors, nurses, and pharmacists who take care of you will do everything they can to keep you safe during your treatment. But medication errors can happen, even in the best hospitals. Studies show that up to 7 percent of inpatients are injured because of mistakes with prescribed drugs.

**Your healthcare is a team effort, and you are an important member of the team.
You and your family can help prevent medication errors.**

Before treatment

Your doctors need information about your medications to make sure new prescriptions don't cause problems.

- Make and carry a **list of all medications you take**, including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Show the medication list to your doctor and nurse.
- **Tell your doctors and nurses about any allergies** you have, or bad reactions you had to medications in the past.
- **Learn what medications you will take** during treatment. Ask what they do, how and when you should take them, and what to do if you miss a dose. Ask about possible side effects, and what you should do if you have them.
- Ask if you should keep taking your usual medications in addition to the new ones.

During treatment

You can help make sure you get the right medication at the right time.

- **Speak up** if something doesn't seem right – for example, if a medication looks different, or the routine changes.
- **Don't let anyone give you a medication without checking your hospital ID bracelet** and saying your full name or birth date.
- When a nurse gives you medicine (IV or oral), **ask what it is**. This can prevent accidental mix-ups.
- Don't take any medicine unless your doctor or nurse practitioner has prescribed or approved it.
- **If you have symptoms from medicine, contact your doctor or nurse right away.**
- Consider asking a relative or friend to come with you to appointments and treatments.

After treatment

Your prescriptions will probably change after treatment ends.

- Ask your doctor to **review with you the list of medications** to take after your treatment is done. Ask if you should resume taking medications you had before treatment.
- **Ask what to expect.** Let the doctor know if you have any unexpected symptoms.
- **Don't discontinue a drug or change the dosage** without talking with your doctor.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before combining over-the-counter drugs with your prescription medicine.

One of the most important things you can do to make your medication use safe is to ASK QUESTIONS when you don't understand what is happening, or something doesn't seem right to you.

For more information about medication safety, contact: Dana-Farber Cancer Institute Center for Patient Safety (617) 632-4935 or www.dana-farber.org/patientsafety