Oral chemotherapy
Oral chemotherapy medicines, also called oral chemo, are cancer treatments that you swallow in the form of a capsule, tablet, or liquid. Oral chemo kills cancer cells in your body and are powerful medicines that could be harmful to other people if they came into contact with them. It’s important to handle these medicines carefully to keep your home and your family safe.

The instructions in this sheet will help guide you on the steps to take while on oral chemotherapy.

Please note: If you are in a clinical trial, you may be given separate instructions. Follow those instructions.

How to take this drug
- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after you take the oral chemo medicine.
- To avoid touching the medicine, caregivers should place the oral chemo into a small cup and hand the cup to the patient. Your caregiver can wear gloves when handling oral chemotherapy that is a liquid.
- Pregnant caregivers should not touch your oral chemotherapy. The medicine may harm an unborn child.
- Swallow each tablet or capsule whole. Do not break, crush, or chew.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take the scheduled dose. Do not double the dose.
- If you are unable to swallow the pill whole, talk with your nurse or pharmacist as soon as possible about other ways to take your medicine.
- If you vomit (throw up) your medicine, call your cancer care team for further instructions.

Storage
- Most oral chemotherapy medicine should be stored at room temperature, away from heat and moisture. For example, do not store the medicine in a bathroom or on a windowsill. See the medicine’s label for specific storage instructions.
- Store this medicine in its original container, in a safe place, away from other family medicines.
- Keep your oral chemotherapy away from food and food prep areas.
- Remember, keep all oral chemotherapy out of the reach of children and pets.

Disposal
- These medicines require special disposal.
- If you have unused oral chemo, return it to the pharmacy where you picked up the medicine.
- Dana-Farber's pharmacy on the second floor of the Yawkey Center also has a bin to safely dispose of any unused medicines.
- Do not flush unused medicine down the toilet, dump in the sink, or throw away in the trash.
- Empty medicine bottles may be thrown out into trash only after you have blacked out patient information that is on the label.
Safe handling of body waste
Oral chemotherapy requires special care to be taken to protect your family, pets, and your home environment. Small amounts of chemo will be in your body waste (such as your urine, stool, or vomit) during and after your therapy.

The tips below will help prevent your body waste from coming into contact with your family and pets during treatment. Check with your cancer care team to understand how long you will need to continue these safety steps after your last dose of oral chemotherapy.

- Pregnant caregivers should not clean or touch patient body waste.
- When possible, you should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household.
- If using a separate bathroom is not possible, use sanitizing wipes to clean the seat, lid, handle and rim of the toilet after each use.
- Sit on the toilet while urinating to avoid spills or drops outside of the toilet.

Toilet flushing
- Always flush the toilet with the lid closed.
- After using the toilet, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- A double flush may be needed if the toilet does not wash away urine or stool completely on the first flush, or for toilets with a low volume of water.
  - Some organizations (American Cancer Society® and OncoLink®) recommend double flushing the toilet each time you use it to limit contact with these toxic medicines. There is no published data that supports double flushing.

Disposing of body wastes
Oral chemotherapy affects your body waste during the entire treatment. If you will be on oral chemo for an extended time, talk with your cancer care team about the precautions that are right for you, your loved ones, and caregivers.

- Wear gloves when cleaning the toilet or disposing of patient waste (urine, stool, vomit).
- Place used gloves and cleaning materials in a Ziploc® or similar resealable plastic bag and seal the bag. Place sealed bag in the trash.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after removing gloves.
- Do not use hand sanitizer to clean your hands. It is not strong enough to destroy oral chemo chemicals on contact.
- If you use ostomy bags, use disposable ones, when possible.
  - If you need assistance when emptying or changing ostomy bags, your caregiver should wear gloves, then remove the gloves after and wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- If urine, vomit, or stool gets on you or your caregiver’s skin, wash skin with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- To clean toilet, commode, or other equipment:
  - Use a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water), or a cleaning solution that contains bleach after each time patient has used toilet.
- Resume usual cleaning of the toilet after the patient has stopped taking oral chemotherapy for 2 days.
Cleaning a spill

- Put on gloves before you start to clean up any spill of body fluid (urine, stool, or vomit).
- If a splash of body fluid occurs, use a disposable, plastic-backed pad, diaper, or towel to contain the fluid.
- Place the used spill materials in a resealable plastic bag and seal it closed.
- Use a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water), or a cleaning solution that contains bleach to clean hard surfaces.
- If a body fluid spill is on clothing or bed sheets, put on gloves, then remove the soiled clothing or sheets.
  - Hold soiled items away from your own clothing and immediately place in the washing machine. If you do not have a washing machine or you cannot clean the materials immediately, place them in a plastic bag and seal. See laundry instructions below.
- Place all used cleaning materials and used gloves in a Ziploc or similar resealable bag. Seal the bag and put in the trash.

Laundry

- Bed linens, towels, and clothes can be cleaned normally with family laundry unless they have been soiled by vomit, urine, stool, or other body waste.

When laundry is soiled:

- If possible, the patient should wash their own laundry to reduce the risk of caregivers coming into contact with soiled laundry.
- Always wear disposable gloves when handling sheets or clothes that have been soiled with the patient’s body waste.
- Wash the patient’s soiled laundry separately from all other laundry.
  - If the fabric allows, use bleach with detergent and the hottest setting possible.
  - If you can’t wash the items right away, store them in a resealable plastic bag.
  - Wash the patient’s soiled laundry twice. You can add family laundry to the second washing.

Body fluids and sex

- When you take oral chemo, the medicine is in your body fluids. You may need to take extra safety steps during sexual activities to keep you and your partner safe and to prevent pregnancy. Your cancer care team will answer all your questions about sexual and reproductive health.

Oral chemotherapy is a medicine that requires extra care. If you have questions or concerns about your oral chemotherapy, talk with your care team. For more tips, tools, and short videos to help you manage oral chemotherapy visit [www.dana-farber.org/oralchemo](http://www.dana-farber.org/oralchemo)

The instructions in this teaching sheet are for informational purposes only. The content is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider with any questions regarding your medical condition. If you experience any significant change in your health during or after treatment, contact a member of your cancer care team right away.