

Oral Cancer Therapy: The Importance of Adherence



When people think of cancer treatment, they frequently picture patients receiving intravenous (IV) treatments over several hours in a hospital or clinic setting. But today, more and more cancer treatments are able to be taken at home—in tablet, capsule, or liquid form.

A Common Struggle

Although oral cancer treatments are easier to take, and more convenient than having to go to a clinic for each treatment, patients often struggle with taking oral medications at home exactly as directed by their health-care provider. But not taking prescribed medications for cancer treatment as directed can decrease how well the drugs work against your cancer. Therefore, adherence is vitally important.

This handout provides some strategies to help you take your cancer drugs properly and safely.

Understanding Your Treatment

Before you start your oral cancer treatment, you should talk with your health-care provider to ensure you know the answers to the following questions:

- What is the name(s) of the medicine(s) you are prescribing for me?
- What does the medicine and its packaging look like?
- Where should I get my prescription filled?
- What should I do if I can't afford my medicine?
- How should I store my medicine?
- When should I take my medicine? Every day? Twice a day? In the morning? At bedtime?
- Are there any special instructions for taking my medication? (Can I break the pills? Can I chew them?)
- Should I take the drug with food, or on an empty stomach? Are there any foods to avoid?
- Will other drugs, supplements, or vitamins I'm taking affect how the cancer drug works?
- What should I do if I miss a dose?
- What side effects might occur? How should I handle them?
- How do I know when to call if I don't feel well after taking my medicine?
- Who should I call with questions?

Tips for Remembering to Take Your Medications

Whether you have an active life or are fairly sedentary, remembering to take your cancer medication can be more of a challenge than one might imagine. But there are many strategies and devices available to help you remember to take your medication, whether you're at home or traveling:

Maintain a routine

A key step in medication adherence is creating a routine that helps you remember to take your medications at the same time each day. If you need to take your medicine every morning before breakfast, consider pairing it with another activity you know you won't forget to do. For example, if you make coffee every morning, you may want to keep your medicine right next to the coffee maker so it becomes routine to do the two activities together.

Set helpful reminders

Sticking to a schedule also contributes to adherence:

- Keep a wall calendar with the days you need to take your medication clearly marked. Then you can check off the task on the calendar as soon as you take it.
- Purchase a pillbox organized by the days of the week. Remember to keep the pillbox visible (and out of reach from children and pets). You can get a simple one

SELECTED MEDICATION APPS FOR SMARTPHONES AND ELECTRONIC PILL DISPENSERS

Smartphone Apps

- ➔ Care4Today
- ➔ MediSafe
- ➔ MyMedSchedule
- ➔ MyMeds
- ➔ MyTherapy
- ➔ Pillboxie
- ➔ Pill Reminder – All in One

Pill Dispensers/Reminder Technology

- ➔ E-pill Once-a-Day Reminder
- ➔ Pria Medication Manager
- ➔ MedFolio
- ➔ MedMinder
- ➔ Med-Q Digital Pill Box Organizer
- ➔ Tabtime Vibe Vibrating Pill Timer Reminder



at your local drugstore, or you can try an electronic pill box (see table for examples) that will alert you to take your medications at certain times.

- Set electronic reminders, including cell phone alarms, smartphone apps, and text messages. (See table for examples.)

Employ the buddy system

Consider asking a family member or friend to give you regular reminders to take your medicine. This can be especially helpful when your normal routine is disrupted by traveling or other events.

Communication! Communication! Communication!

Regardless of the method you choose to help you adhere to your medication schedule, communication is key. If you find it challenging to take your medications, talk with your healthcare provider. As a team, you can find the right strategy to help you succeed in taking your medications properly and ultimately get the most out of your treatment.

Financial Assistance and Reimbursement Programs

Many cancer drugs come through a specialty pharmacy. Your care team can help you find out if you're eligible for financial assistance through that pharmacy system. Here is a list of other sources that may be able to help you with the cost of other medications you may need to take during your cancer treatment.

➔ CancerCare Co-Payment Assistance Foundation

<http://cancercarecopay.org> • 1-866-55-COPAY

➔ Good Rx

GoodRx.com

➔ The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Co-Pay Assistance Program

www.lls.org/copay • 1-877-557-2672

➔ NeedyMeds

www.needymeds.org • 1-800-503-6897

➔ Patient Access Network Foundation

panfoundation.org • 1-866-316-7263

➔ Patient Advocate Foundation

patientadvocate.org • 1-800-532-5274

➔ PSI: Patient Services Inc

patientservicesinc.org • 1-800-366-7741