



# CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

## Learning About Taking Chemotherapy Medicine at Home

### Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions

Chemotherapy is treatment with medicines that destroy cancer cells. It's often called "chemo." The medicines you take at home work just as well as the ones that are given in the hospital or clinic.

For these medicines to help you the most, you need to take them safely and correctly. The medicines you take at home can have the same side effects as the chemo that's given in the hospital or clinic. Always handle them with care. Follow your doctor's instructions about taking them and storing them.

You'll meet with your doctor or nurse often during your treatment. They will answer your questions about your medicines. You'll learn which ones you're taking and what they'll do for you. You'll also get instructions on how to take the medicines.

### Possible side effects

Side effects depend on which medicines you're taking, your dose, and how the medicines affect you. Your doctor can tell you what you can expect when you take these medicines. Some of them may cause symptoms such as:

- Fatigue.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- A rash.
- Hair loss.
- Pain or tingling in your hands or the soles of your feet.

## Learning About Taking Chemotherapy Medicine at Home (Page 2 of 3)

You may have other side effects or reactions. Ask your doctor about your medicines and their side effects. Hair loss may be a side effect of one medicine, while nausea may be caused by another.

Your doctor will tell you what to do if you have side effects. You'll also learn which ones you need to tell your doctor about right away.

Most side effects will go away after you finish chemotherapy.

## What to know about taking your medicine

Be safe with your chemo medicines. Take them exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with them.

Make a daily schedule of your medicines. Then you'll know ahead of time when to take them. Put your schedule someplace where you will always see it and where it is easy to find.

Read any instructions that come with your chemo medicines. Follow all directions about how to handle, take, and store them. Caregivers should follow these directions too.

## Use care

Chemo medicines are powerful chemicals. Don't touch the pills with your bare hands. Wear disposable gloves when you handle the pills. Wash your hands when you're done. Don't handle chemo medicines if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

It's important to keep others from touching the pills too. Keep them away from children and pets.

## Take your chemo safely

- When you take a pill, pour it from the bottle into the bottle cap, a spoon, or a disposable medicine cup. Then tip it into your mouth and swallow.
- Don't crush, break, or chew the pills. Talk to your doctor if it is hard for you to swallow them.
- Don't change or skip a dose, unless your doctor says to. Call your doctor right away if you miss a dose or take too much.
- If you vomit a dose of your medication soon after you take it, call your doctor right away.

## Store your chemo safely

- Store your chemo medicines in the containers they came in. Don't let the chemo pills touch other medicines.

## Learning About Taking Chemotherapy Medicine at Home (Page 3 of 3)

- Don't store your chemo near food or drinks or in places where you eat. Don't store it in direct sun or in places where it could get damp.

### Be safe with body fluids

The chemicals in the medicine leave your body through vomit, urine, or stool. The chemicals can stay in your body fluids for several days after your last treatment. So don't let anyone touch any waste from your body. Have caregivers use gloves when washing bed linens. And wash your linens separately from other items, including other linens and clothes.

Always flush twice after using the toilet. Also, couples should use a condom during sex while a partner is getting chemo treatments and for several days after treatment ends.

### Caregivers

Caregivers should always wear gloves when handling chemo medicines or when coming into contact with body fluids. They should wash their hands before and after putting on gloves. It's best to have as few caregivers as possible handle the chemo.

### What else should you know?

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take. This includes over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Talk with your doctor before you take any new medicines or supplements. He or she can tell you if it's safe to take them while you are on chemotherapy.

You might not have any chemo medicine left when you finish treatment. But if you do, follow your doctor's instructions about what to do with it. You may have to take it back to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

### Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.kp.org>

Enter **P913** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About Taking Chemotherapy Medicine at Home.**"

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