

# Cancer treatments at home

## Chemotherapy and targeted therapy



Your doctor has prescribed medication for chemotherapy or targeted therapy, in the form of pills or capsules to be taken orally. This fact sheet tells you what precautions to take and how to follow this treatment.

### Why do I need to take precautions with these medications?

Oral chemotherapy destroys cancer cells through what is called the cytotoxic effect (*cyto* means *cell*). Targeted therapy attacks parts of cancerous cells. But these two treatments can also have toxic effects on normal cells. That's why it's extremely important to follow the safety measures described in this document. Your family, friends, and pets should not come into contact with these medications.

### Where should I keep my medications?

These medications should be kept in the original containers given to you by the pharmacist. These containers are:

- rigid and airtight
- hard for children to open
- clearly marked CYTOTOXIC



A disposable pill pack prepared at the pharmacy, containing **only your cancer medication**, is another good solution.



#### ATTENTION

Store these containers:

- **where children can't reach them**
- where animals can't reach them
- at room temperature, away from heat sources
- away from light (for example, in a cabinet)
- away from humidity

Once a container is empty, return it to your pharmacy. If this isn't possible, throw it in a garbage can with a lid. These containers must never be reused for other objects or food.

## What precautions should I take when handling my medications?

- > **Wash your hands** before and after touching the pills.
- > Don't put the pills on any surface outside of the container. Use the cover to hold the pills as you count them.
- > If the pills have come into contact with a surface outside the container, wash the surface with soap and water.
- > Once you've taken your tablets, seal the container and store it out of reach of children and animals right away.



Anyone who is helping you to handle your medications must wear **disposable gloves**. You can buy these at the pharmacy. Even though the gloves are disposable, helpers should **wash their hands** before putting them on and after taking them off.



**Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not touch cytotoxic medications.**

Tell your dentist and any other healthcare professionals you consult that you're undergoing oral cancer treatment. This may affect the care they give you. Bring along an up-to-date list of medications you're taking.

## How should I take my oral cancer medications?

It's important to follow the directions on the label. For example, don't crush, chew, open, or dissolve the pills or capsules before swallowing them.

Make sure you know:

- how many times you're supposed to take your medication each day
- at what times you're supposed to take it
- whether you should take it on an empty stomach or with food

If you have questions, call your pharmacist.

## What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you forget a dose, don't double up on the next one. Call your pharmacist, who will explain what to do.

Use an alarm clock or a calendar to help you remember to take your pills.



## What should I do if I take more than the recommended dose of my medication?

Call your doctor, your pharmacist, or your nurse **immediately**.

## What should I do if someone else accidentally swallows my pills?

Try to make the person throw up. If this happens while the oncology clinic is open, contact **your pharmacist or your nurse**.

If the clinic is closed, call:

**Poison Control Centre:**

> **1 800 463-5060**

If you can't get the person to throw up and can't reach your nurse or the Poison Control Centre, the person needs to go to the emergency room. They should bring along the name of the medication and the quantity that was swallowed in milligrams (mg).

## How do I check my temperature?

Call a CHUM nurse if your oral temperature is:

- higher than 38 °C (100.4 °F) for more than one hour
- higher than 38.3 °C (100.9 °F)

> **514 890-8086**

This service is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. When calling, be sure to have your health insurance card on hand.



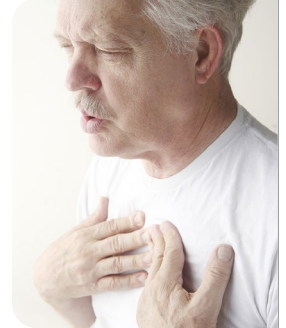
### ATTENTION

Don't take Advil, Tylenol, Motrin or aspirin, all of which can hide a fever.

## What other signs of infection should I watch out for?

It's important to speak to a nurse on your care team if you notice any of the following signs:

- > Chest pain
- > Rapid heartbeat, even at rest
- > Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- > 4 loose bowel movements (diarrhea) or more every day for the past 2 days
- > No bowel movements for 3 days
- > Unable to drink anything for more than 24 hours
- > Vomiting for more than 24 hours
- > Nausea lasting more than 48 hours
- > Sudden and profuse bleeding (from any part of the body)
- > Sudden extreme fatigue or intense desire to sleep
- > Intense anxiety or thoughts of suicide.



## What are the side effects of oral cancer treatments?

Chemotherapy can cause:

- fatigue
- nausea and vomiting
- mouth ulcers
- diarrhea or constipation

Targeted therapy can cause:

- fatigue
- mouth ulcers
- redness or pimples on the skin
- diarrhea

These effects are often temporary and can be treated. Ask your care team for fact sheets on these side effects.

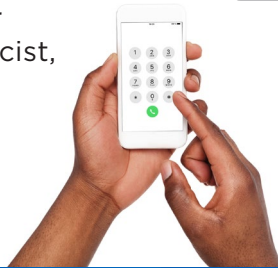
## My treatment is over now. What should I do with the pills that are left?

Keep them in their original container and return them to the pharmacy. They will be safely destroyed.

**Never throw these medications in the toilet or the garbage.**

## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions, contact your pharmacist, your oncology pharmacist, your nurse, or your doctor.



### USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Cancer Society:  
> **1 888 939-3333**  
> **cancer.ca**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website  
**chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante**



## NOTEPAD



### Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.



*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
**chumontreal.qc.ca**