

WHAT CANCER PATIENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ORAL MEDS

This tool is a benefit of membership.

 Association of Community Cancer Centers

What's the difference between an infused drug and an oral drug?



Most chemotherapy drugs come as solutions that are injected or infused into patients in the doctor's office. However, some drugs are pills, tablets, or capsules that patients can take on their own. If you and your doctor decide that one of these oral drugs is the best one for you, you will be given a prescription for the drug and it will be your responsibility to get that prescription filled.

Where can I get my prescription filled?



Often you will have a choice of where you want to fill your drug prescriptions.

1. At your doctor's office (this will vary by state, and some states do not allow physicians to dispense prescriptions at all)
2. At your cancer program (an outpatient pharmacy)
3. At a retail pharmacy in your community (Walgreens, CVS, Rite Aid, etc.)
4. Through a mail order pharmacy
5. At a specialty pharmacy (for some drugs, this type of pharmacy is the only option)

With all of these choices, how do I make the decision that is best for me?



The following table shows how the dispenser (the place where your prescription is filled or the person who fills your prescription) can help you with your oral drug. It lists:

1. The dispenser's responsibilities
2. Reasons why those responsibilities are important
3. The different ways in which dispensers fulfill each responsibility
4. What you—as the patient—can do to help

Deciding which dispenser is best for you depends on many different factors, including your insurance, the specific drug you are prescribed, whether your doctor's office dispenses that drug, and most important, your personal preferences. You and your doctor can use this information to decide the best way for you to get your prescription filled.

HOW PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISPENSERS & PATIENTS CAN COLLABORATE ON QUALITY CARE

Dispenser's Responsibility

Make sure it is safe for you to take the drug.

Why This Is Important

Some cancer drugs can be unsafe (or less effective) if they interact with drugs you are already taking. Your doctor will check for possible interactions (or allergies to the drug) when prescribing, but having the dispenser run another check is a good idea.

How Dispensers Do It

The dispenser enters the name of the prescribed drug into a reference database and sees whether it interacts with any drug, vitamin, or supplements that you are taking.

Your Role

Both your doctor and the dispenser depend on you to give them the complete list of all the drugs, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. You also need to alert both the dispenser and your doctor if that list changes.

Check that your health insurance will pay for the drug.

Most insurance companies require the dispenser to get approval before they give you the oral cancer drug or else the insurance company will not pay for it.

The dispenser submits a request to the insurance company for authorization to give you the drug. If the insurance company denies the request, the dispenser can appeal or ask your doctor to appeal that decision.

Make sure your insurance information is up to date and correct. The dispenser may ask you to contact your insurance company if there is a problem.

Get the drug to you.

This will allow you to follow the treatment regimen your doctor has prescribed to treat your cancer.

Some dispensers mail the drug to you, some require you to pick it up, and some will give you a choice of which method you prefer.

If both options are available, tell the dispenser which you prefer. If the drug is sent by mail, let the dispenser know of any special arrangements you might need. For example, whether you need confidential packaging, live in a building with restricted access, or need someone else to sign for the drug.

Explain to you the correct way to take the drug.

Cancer drugs often have a long list of "do's" and "don'ts," for example whether the drug must be taken with or without food, what to do if you miss a dose, and when it might be necessary to reduce the dose. Following instructions is important if the drug is to be safe and effective.

If you pick up the drug, the dispenser will meet with you and go through the instructions. If you get the drug in the mail, the dispenser will usually call and explain how to take the drug. Some dispensers use video chats to go over these instructions. Most will give (or send) you written material with instructions.

Make sure you understand the instructions. It often helps to read the instructions aloud to the dispenser.

Dispenser's Responsibility

Why This Is Important

How Dispensers Do It

Your Role

Help you take the drug correctly.

It can take days or weeks until taking the drug becomes part of your routine. Even then, things can come up (travel, minor illness) that might throw you off your routine.

There are many different types of dispensing programs. Some wait for you to contact them if you need help. Others will contact you just to check on things. Some contact you every few weeks. Others get in touch every day. Some will have a person call, while others use automated calls or texts as reminders.

Ask the dispenser for the contact options and tell the dispenser which option you prefer. If you are finding it difficult to stay on track, contact the dispensing program immediately.

Explain what you should expect when you take the drug.

Cancer drugs can have both expected and unexpected effects. Some effects can be ignored and some need your immediate attention.

The dispenser does this at the same time that he or she explains how to take the drug correctly. That means some will do it in person, others by phone, and some by video chat.

Make sure the dispenser has answered all your questions, including when you need to contact someone and who that person should be (your doctor, the dispenser).

Answer any questions that you might have about the drug once you start taking it.

Even with the best preparation, questions may come up while you are taking the drug. For example, "Is it a problem if the pills sat in the sun for an hour?"

All dispensers will have phone numbers for you to call. Some also respond to e-mail and to text or e-chat messages.

Be clear on who to contact for different types of questions, the best times to get in touch, and who to call if questions come up at night or on weekends.

Manage prescription refills.

It may be unsafe to suddenly stop taking a drug. Also, many drugs are less effective if they are not taken every day. The dispenser needs to make sure the drug is available when you need it and that you know to get the drug on time.

Dispensers can use phone, e-mail, and text to remind you that it is almost time for a refill.

Let the dispenser know how you would like to be contacted and the best time (the day before, a few days before, time of day).

Help patients who need financial assistance.

The patient "co-pay" for cancer drugs (the amount you are responsible for) usually runs about one-quarter to one-third of the full cost. This can be hundreds (or even thousands) of dollars every month. Fortunately there are programs that can help patients who cannot afford to pay for their drugs.

Many (but not all) dispensers can help you find financial support, if you need it. Many dispensers know the programs that provide financial assistance for your specific drug. They can fill out the application or help you fill out the application. They can also help you with an appeal if necessary.

All patient assistance programs ask for proof of income level—usually recent tax returns—which you will need to have ready. Some require you (not the dispenser or your doctor) to submit the application for aid.



Association of Community Cancer Centers

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About the Association of Community Cancer Centers

The Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC) serves as the leading advocacy and education organization for the multidisciplinary cancer care team. Approximately 20,000 cancer care professionals from 2,000 hospitals and practices nationwide are affiliated with ACCC. Providing a national forum for addressing issues that affect community cancer programs, ACCC is recognized as the premier provider of resources for the entire oncology care team. Our members include medical and radiation oncologists, surgeons, cancer program administrators and medical directors, senior hospital executives, practice managers, pharmacists, oncology nurses, radiation therapists, social workers, and cancer program data managers. If you are a provider and not an ACCC member, join today at acc-cancer.org or email membership@acc-cancer.org. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and read our blog, ACCCBuzz.

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