Important Terms for Cancer Medicines You Take by Mouth

Understanding your treatment options and related terminology can help you better manage your cancer care. Here are some common terms related to cancer medicines that you take by mouth:

Adherence

Medication adherence means taking your prescribed medicines exactly as your care team directs—at the right dose, at the right time, and on the schedule they recommend. Following your treatment plan closely helps maximize effectiveness and minimize side effects.

Treatment Cycle

A treatment cycle is a set period during which you receive your medicine or treatment, followed by a break to allow your body to recover. After the break, the cycle repeats until your treatment goal is reached. This structured schedule helps ensure your body can handle the treatment and gives your healthcare team a way to monitor your progress.

Examples:

- **Chemotherapy**: You may receive chemotherapy pills every day for 2 weeks, then take 2 weeks off to rest. This 4-week period is one cycle, and you might go through multiple cycles depending on your treatment plan.
- **Targeted Therapy**: You may be asked to take your medication daily for 3 weeks, followed by a 1-week break, making each cycle 4 weeks long.
- **Hormone Therapy**: Often taken continuously without breaks, but sometimes scheduled in cycles.

Important:

The length of these cycles can vary a lot. Some may be as short as 1 week, while others can last 4 weeks or more.

The specifics depend on your type of cancer and the treatment approach. Sometimes, the cycle length changes during treatment based on the phase of therapy. Other times, it may change based on how your body responds to the treatment.

Your care team will give you details about your schedule, so you know what to expect.

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Types of Cancer Therapies Taken by Mouth

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy ("Chemo") kills or stops cancer cells from growing.

These medicines are often hazardous and require special handling and safety precautions for body fluids for at least 2 days after each dose.

Examples: capecitabine (Xeloda), hydroxyurea (Hydrea), mercaptopurine (Purixan), methotrexate, temozolomide (Temodar)

Hormone Therapy

Hormone therapy blocks or changes hormones to slow down cancer growth.

Some cancers, like prostate and breast cancer, rely on hormones to grow. Hormone therapy helps slow or stop the growth of these cancers.

Hormone therapy is also called "endocrine therapy" or "hormonal therapy".

Examples: abiraterone (Yonsa, Zytiga), anastrazole (Arimidex), enzalutamide (Xtandi), letrozole (Femara), tamoxifen

Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy is designed to find and attack specific targets on, in, or near cancer cells.

Some targeted therapies block signals that promote cancer growth, while others help your immune system recognize and destroy cancer cells. Others work in different ways.

Examples: cabozantinib (Cometriq, Cabometyx), imatinib (Gleevec), osimertinib (Tagrisso), sunitinib (Sutent), zanubrutinib (Brukinsa)

Final Note

Knowing these terms can help you better understand your treatment plan and communicate effectively with your healthcare team. Always ask questions if you're unsure about any aspect of your therapy — being informed helps you stay proactive and engaged in your care.

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Notes

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