

IO4 Medication Safety at home – podcast

Introduction: Welcome! You are listening to EBreast 2 learning materials about medication safety at home after chemotherapy. I am an oncology nurse and today I am consulting a breast cancer patient who is starting chemotherapy intravenously and orally. The specific drugs have not yet been decided. This way you can hear the overall information about this subject. The dialogue you are going to hear is between a nurse and a 38 year old female patient. For educational purposes the names are fictional.

Nurse (N): Hello! My name is Lisa and I am a nurse, please take a seat.

Patient (P): Thank you and hello. My name is Sara Smith.

N: I am a nurse consultant and today I would like to talk more about how chemotherapy is going to affect your everyday life. I can see from your documents you are starting chemotherapy next week. You probably have some additional questions and thoughts. I would like to know what are the most important subjects for you to start with?

P: I have read about my diagnosis and probable side-effects. But I would first like to know more about safety precautions after chemotherapy. How can I help myself at home? Do I have to do anything specific or can I live my life as I want?

N: I am glad you want to know more about medication safety at home. I will explain everything to you right away. But first I need to ask you, do you live by yourself?

P: No, I live with my husband, a 10 year old son and a 5 year old daughter.

N: Very nice. It is important to have family around you while you are getting chemotherapy. There are many things you can do during and after chemo to keep yourself and your loved ones from being affected by the chemo drugs while your body is getting rid of them. You are the only person who should be exposed to the chemo you are getting. Any kind of chemo (this includes pills, powder, dust, liquids) can be hazardous to others if they are around it. It generally takes about 48 to 72 hours for your body to get rid of most chemo drugs. [1]

P: How is the body getting rid of chemo? Should I isolate myself from my family?

N: No! You should NOT isolate yourself from your family. Physical contact (like hugging, playing, touching) with your close ones is safe. [3]

It is good to be aware that most of the drug waste comes out in your body fluids, such as urine, stool, tears, sweat, and vomit. The drug waste is also in your blood, and may be in other body fluids such as fluids from semen and the vagina. When chemo drugs or their waste are outside your body, they can harm or irritate skin. Other people and pets could be exposed to the drug waste for a few days if they come into contact with any of your body fluids. It is very important to follow safety measures to reduce exposure to chemotherapy at home, both for you and for people around you. Unless your doctor says differently, you can be around family and friends. [1,2]

P: What can my family members or caregivers do to protect themselves? Are they safe near me?

N: It is absolutely normal to worry about the safety of family and friends while you are having chemotherapy. There is little risk to your family, visitors, including children, babies and pregnant women, because they aren't likely to come into contact with any chemotherapy drugs or body fluids. [2]

In the first 48 to 72 hours after receiving chemo it would be wise to:

- Have children use a different toilet than the one you use. [1]
- Flush the toilet twice after using it (also after vomiting into it). If you vomit into a bucket, carefully empty it into the toilet with minimal splashing. Flush twice. Always put the lid down before flushing. [1;2;3]
- Sit on the toilet when using it. [1;3]
- Wash your hands with warm water and soap after using the toilet. Prefer paper towels for drying your hands and throw them away. [1;2]
- Keep the toilet lid down when you are not using it to keep pets and children from drinking or playing with it. [1]
- If any clothes or sheets have body fluids on them they should be washed by washing machine (not by hand) and separately from other laundry. [1;2;3] Use the longest washing machine cycle (hot or cold water can be used), and wash twice. [2]
- When someone's body is unexpectedly in contact with chemo, it is important to wash the chemo off as soon as possible with a lot of warm water for at least five minutes. [3]
- Caregivers and family members should wear two pairs of throw-away gloves if they need to be in contact with any body fluids. After they should always wash hands with warm water and soap (even if they wore gloves). [1]
- If needed prefer throw-away cleaning cloths, paper towels, gloves, adult diapers, underwear or sanitary pads. Seal them in two plastic bags and throw them away with your regular trash. [1;2]

P: What kind of safety measures I should use for oral chemo?

N: Any dust from pill or capsule from oral chemo can be hazardous to others if they are around it. It is important to be careful not to let others come in contact with chemo pills and with your bodily fluids while taking oral chemo. Chemo pills have to be kept in the original bottle or box they came in. This means that you should NOT put the pills or capsules on the table, plate, counter, the pill organiser or anywhere else. When it is time to take the medication, then you can open the bottle, put the pill into your mouth and wash your hands after without touching anything else. [1;2]

P: Can I have sex or share intimacy with my husband?

N: Yes, you can have intimacy and sex. It would be wise to use barrier contraception, like condoms or female condoms, if having any kind of sex. This helps to protect your partner from any chemotherapy drugs that may be present in your body fluids. [2] The most important thing is to listen to your body and act accordingly. If you need rest, then rest. If you need intimacy and soft touches, then go for it.

Was everything clear or do you have any additional questions?

P: Everything was clear. Thank you for explaining.

N: If you have any additional questions then here is my contact information. We can talk about other subjects in the next meeting. Thank You for coming and Good bye.

P: Thank You. Good bye.

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