

## Patient information factsheet

# Taking oral systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT)

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has recommended you start oral systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT). It explains what SACT is, what the treatment involves and what the potential benefits and risks are. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor or clinical nurse specialist.

### What is oral systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT)?

SACT is medication given to treat cancer. It is taken orally (swallowed) and comes as tablets or capsules. SACT can be taken at home, meaning you don't have to come into hospital to receive your treatment.

There are different types of SACT. Some of these medications attack cancer cells and work throughout the body (chemotherapy) and some use the immune system to find and attack the cancer cells (immunotherapy). The SACT treatment you have will depend on your cancer type. Your doctor or clinical nurse specialist will explain more about this, along with details of how to take your medicine and any possible side effects.

If you have a question regarding your specific treatment, please contact your clinical nurse specialist.

### Side effects and when to seek help

You may have some side effects while taking SACT medication.

We will give you a 'traffic light' symptom reporting tool which will advise when to call the Macmillan acute oncology service (MAOS) for advice about side effects.

You should also call the MAOS if you experience:

- more than four episodes of diarrhoea in 24 hours (you should also stop taking the SACT medication until you have spoken to MAOS)
- nausea or vomiting (feeling or being sick) that doesn't get better after you've taken the anti-sickness medication
- bruising more easily than normal
- blood spots (new red dots or areas) on the skin
- new rashes or skin irritation
- red, painful or swollen hands or feet
- your skin turning yellow (jaundice)
- abnormal bleeding from anywhere, for example, your nose, mouth, or back passage (rectum)

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- shivering or shaking (feeling hot or cold)
- severe fatigue/exhaustion (unable to carry out daily tasks)
- coughing up phlegm (especially if it is yellow or green)
- ulcers and a sore mouth (for example, if drinking or swallowing becomes difficult)
- a burning or stinging feeling when passing urine
- feeling generally unwell

## Sepsis

Sepsis (also called blood poisoning) is a serious and potentially life-threatening complication of an infection. Having cancer and taking some cancer treatments increases your risk of developing a condition called neutropenic sepsis, which is caused by having a reduced number of neutrophils (a type of white blood cell that helps us to fight infections).

If your neutrophil levels become low, and you develop an infection, you will require immediate medical attention.

**If you begin to feel unwell, please check your temperature. If it is 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C, this could be a sign of infection. You should call MAOS immediately.**

## Storing the medication

You should always store your medication in its original container, away from pets and children.

Some medications may need to be stored in the fridge, so always check the label to see whether this applies to your medication.

## How to handle the medication

You should avoid handling the SACT medication directly. Depending on how your medication is packaged, you should transfer it into a medicine pot by pushing the medication out of the blister pack or tipping it out of the jar. Your chemotherapy nurses may be able to provide you with some medicine pots, or you can use a small cup you only use for this purpose. You should then wash your hands thoroughly.

If someone else prepares your medication for you, they should wear gloves and avoid touching the medication directly. They should wash their hands thoroughly after removing the gloves.

Your medication should not be handled by anyone who is pregnant or planning a pregnancy, unless advised otherwise by your team.

## How to take your medication

Your medication is for your own use only. Don't allow anyone else to take it.

## How much medication should I take?

How much medication you need to take will depend on the type of SACT treatment you have. You might need to take more than one type of medication as part of your regime, or you might be given two boxes of the same drug at different strengths to make up the dose you need. You should always check the dose on the label to make sure you take the correct amount of medication at the correct time.

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## How should I take my medication?

You should always check the label to confirm how to take the medication.

### Do not:

- crush, cut or chew your tablets
- open any capsules, as these should be swallowed whole

If you have problems swallowing, ask your doctor or chemotherapy nurses for advice.

Some medication should be taken with food, and some without food. You may need to avoid certain foods while taking the medication. These will be listed on the label of the medication and on the patient information leaflet inside the medication box.

If you're not sure how to take the medication, contact your chemotherapy nurse or the person who sees you in clinic (doctor or advanced nurse practitioner).

## What happens if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose, you should take the next dose as usual. You should contact your medical team or MAOS for advice.

### Do not:

- try to catch up
- double the next dose

## Can I take SACT with other medication?

If you take or are planning to take any other medication or supplements while on SACT medication, you will need to check these with your doctor or SACT clinical nurse specialist (CNS). This is because other medication may affect your SACT treatment.

## What do I do with any leftover medication?

You may have medication left over if you missed doses, were unwell or if the dose was stopped or changed during treatment. If you have any medication left at the end of your treatment, please bring it back to the hospital in its packaging. This is so the pharmacy can dispose of it safely. Don't throw it in your household waste bin.

## Aftercare

Your immune system may be affected while you are on SACT medication. You can go about your normal daily activities while you are on SACT medication, unless your doctor has advised you otherwise. However, you should avoid spending time with people who are unwell.

Your doctor will see you in clinic (face-to-face, telephone or virtual) between each cycle of SACT treatment. We will also arrange for you to have blood tests done between each cycle. You will receive a letter about these blood tests. You may be able to have your blood tests done at your GP surgery or at home. You can talk to your doctor about this.

## Contact us

Macmillan acute oncology service (MAOS)

Telephone: **023 8120 1345**

Hamwic House reception

Telephone: **023 8120 2431**

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## Useful links

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

[www.cancerresearchuk.org/](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/)

For a translation of this document, or a version in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**