

Adherence to Medications

Breast cancer isn't stopping Cynthia Vega from aiming high: mastering archery with her daughter, Madison. When she was diagnosed just over a year ago, the cancer had already spread. And Cynthia had one priority.

"My children - who's gonna take care of them? And I was already talking to relatives, making preparations, legal documents, you know, so that someone would be there to take care of them after I was gone."-Cynthia, Patient

"So, you're getting it...it just takes practice."-Cynthia, Patient

Since then, Cynthia's done very well thanks to her chemotherapy treatment. Cynthia's chemo is in pill form - so she takes it on her own – which means she also takes on added responsibility for her treatment.

"I take it as prescribed by my doctor. I follow all the instructions."-Cynthia, Patient

Cynthia's the perfect patient for oral medication.

"You're taking one pill a day with this one?" "Yeah."

By "perfect," Cynthia's doctor means she is adherent. That is, she is "sticking to" it – in every way.

"By 'sticking to it,' we mean things like taking the number of pills or showing up for your appointment; taking it as directed and continuing to take it for as long as you need to take it."- Dr. Marleen Meyers, MD, Oncologist

Adherence to treatment is crucial, because if medication is not taken correctly, it won't work properly. Cancer drugs are taken at certain times in order to stay at a constant level in your bloodstream.

"When that level drops or if the level goes too high, it might be too toxic or too many side effects for you. With if it goes to low, it may not be effective in killing the cancer cells."- Dr. Marleen Meyers, MD, Oncologist

Sometimes people skip a treatment because they feel better and believe they don't need it. Or they feel worse, and don't want to deal with more side effects. Or they're are concerned about cost and want to save money. Whatever the reason, skipping a treatment is not an option – and can be dangerous.

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"Any barriers that are preventing you, whether financially or emotionally from getting the treatment, from picking up the prescriptions, any of those things can generally be overcome if you just mention it to your healthcare provider. There usually are good solutions." - Dr. Marleen Meyers, MD, Oncologist

Often people don't take medication as prescribed because they simply forget. Here are some ways to help you remember: write down when and how to take each of your pills. And put the note in a place you'll see it daily. Use a pillbox. They're inexpensive and can hold up to a month's supply. Set an alarm on your phone, watch, or computer, for each time you need to take a pill. Keep a daily journal: make a chart for each week and check off the box for each medication, immediately after you take it. Tie taking your medication to another part of your daily routine like brushing your teeth if you do miss a dose, call your health care team and ask what to do.

"Don't just assume, 'I missed yesterday; I can take two today; that will be fine.' Or 'I missed my morning dose. I can take two in the evening.' That's not at all the way things work." - Dr. Marleen Meyers, MD, Oncologist

By carefully following instructions, Cynthia is getting the most out of her medication and is able to set her sights on getting the most out of life.

"With my treatment going so well I can see myself being at my like, my daughter's graduation, and, seeing my son, doing his karate class, and, and just being there for them, for long term." - Cynthia, Patient