

ASK A PHARMACIST



Splitting or crushing tablets; drugs and citrus fruits

Which medicines can be split or crushed for administration?

Cancer patients may have difficulty swallowing oral tablets, or may require a dose that necessitates splitting a tablet. In general, any tablet that is labeled extended-release (XR or ER) or sustained-release (SR) should not be crushed or split. This is because crushing or splitting will damage the tablet's infrastructure, causing dumping of what would otherwise have been spread out over a longer time period. Some tablets have an enteric coating (EC) that prevents the drug inside from being destroyed by stomach acid. Crushing or splitting these tablets will release the drug into the stomach, where it may be broken down and not absorbed. There are also oral medications (including

many oral chemotherapies) that should not be split or crushed because they can irritate mucus membranes, or because they can cause harm to the caregiver. As a general rule, most oral chemotherapies should not be split or crushed unless noted otherwise. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) maintains a list of many drugs that cannot be crushed. This list is available at www.ismp.org/tools/donotcrush.pdf. The list is not exhaustive, so it is best to review a patient's medications with a pharmacist prior to recommending splitting or crushing.

The message in your response to the question "Can citrus fruits interfere with drug metabolism?" seems to be to avoid all citrus. We have recommended that regular orange juice consumption is not a problem with regard to medications. Can you clarify?

—Marsha S. Eisen, RD

Thanks for the question. Certain citrus fruits, such as grapefruit, Seville orange,



Lisa A. Thompson, PharmD, BCOP

Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Pharmacy, University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Aurora, Colorado.

and bitter orange, are best avoided when patients are being treated with medications that interact with them. Regular oranges, as you mention, have not been shown to affect drug metabolism to a clinically significant extent and may be consumed by patients taking some of the medications mentioned. However, patients should avoid citrus fruits that are known to interact with medications they are taking.

TIP FOR PATIENTS
National Drug Take-Back Day:
April 27, 2013

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has scheduled a prescription drug take-back day for Saturday, April 27, 2013 (10 AM to 2 PM). This is a great opportunity for patients and their caregivers to dispose of unwanted or unused prescription drugs in a way that prevents drug diversion and protects the environment. For more information, and to find a location near you, please visit www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/.

Go to www.oncologynurseadvisor.com/how-can-meds-be-disposed-of-safely/article/260018/ and www.oncologynurseadvisor.com/educating-patients-about-the-proper-disposal-of-old-drugs/article/168850/ for more information on drug take-back events and medication disposal methods if there is no event in your area. ■