

Tamoxifen

This leaflet is offered as a guide to you and your family. The possible benefits of treatment vary; for some people hormonal therapy may reduce the risk of cancer coming back, for others it may control the cancer and its symptoms. Your doctor will explain to you whether you will receive chemotherapy or another type of treatment or a combination of both. Your doctor or nurse will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

Your treatment

Your doctor or nurse clinician has prescribed for you a treatment which includes the hormonal therapy tamoxifen.

Treatment: Tamoxifen 20mg tablet taken ONCE a day continuously until your doctor tells you otherwise. You can take it with or without food. Try to take it at the same time each day, morning or evening.

You may take tamoxifen after surgery and with other treatments to reduce the risk of breast cancer coming back. You will usually take it for a few years. Doctors sometimes prescribe it before or after you have another type of hormonal therapy drug.

This treatment can have serious or possibly life-threatening side effects. It is very important that you report side effects straight away. Don't delay, if you feel unwell, please ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658**. The lines are open 24 hours a day.

Hormones are substances produced naturally in the body. They act as chemical messengers and help control the activity of cells and organs. Hormonal therapies are drugs that interfere with the way hormones are made or how they work in the body.

Many breast cancers rely on the hormone oestrogen to grow. This type of breast cancer is called oestrogen receptor-positive (ER positive) breast cancer. Tamoxifen blocks oestrogen from reaching the cancer cells. This means the cancer may grow more slowly or stop growing altogether.

If you feel unwell, you have symptoms of an infection, or your temperature is **37.5°C or above, or below 36°C contact The Christie Hotline straight away.**



Possible side effects

Hormonal therapy can cause different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others. Everyone is different and not everyone gets all the side effects. Most side effects are usually temporary, but in some rare cases they can be life-threatening. It is important to tell your hospital doctor or nurse about any side effects so they can be monitored, and where possible, treated.

Common side effects (more than 1 in 10)

• Hot flushes

Hot flushes and sweats may occur but do lessen after the first few months. Cutting down on nicotine, alcohol and hot drinks containing caffeine, such as tea and coffee can help. Dress in layers, so you can remove clothes as needed. Natural fabrics, such as cotton may feel more comfortable. If hot flushes are a problem, tell your doctor. Low doses of certain antidepressant drugs can help to reduce flushes.

• Vaginal bleeding and dryness

For some women tamoxifen causes vaginal bleeding. If this happens it is most likely to be in the first few weeks of treatment, or when you change from another hormonal therapy to tamoxifen. If the bleeding continues for more than a few days, tell your doctor or nurse.

For some women, tamoxifen causes vaginal dryness. Non-hormonal creams and gels or lubricants can help reduce dryness and discomfort during sex. You can buy these at a chemist or your doctor can prescribe them.

If you are still having periods, they may become irregular, lighter or sometimes stop altogether. Also, your sex drive may be lower while taking tamoxifen. Talk to your doctor or nurse for advice.

• Sickness and diarrhoea

Any sickness is usually mild, but let your doctor know if this happens. Tamoxifen may also cause indigestion or tummy pain. Let them know if you have any of these symptoms. They can prescribe drugs to help.

If diarrhoea becomes a problem during or after your treatment, anti-diarrhoeal tablets can be prescribed by your doctor. Ask the staff for a copy of the booklet 'Eating: help yourself' which has some useful ideas about diet when you are having treatment.

• Constipation

You may become constipated. Try to drink plenty of fluids and eat foods which are high in fibre. Tell your doctor who may prescribe a suitable laxative. Please contact The Christie Hotline if your constipation lasts more than 3 days or you experience abdominal discomfort.

• Blurred vision

Tamoxifen may cause cataracts (clouding of the lens of the eye) or other eye problems. If you get blurred vision or notice any change in your vision, always tell your doctor or nurse.

• Headaches and dizziness

If you have headaches, let your doctor or nurses know. They can usually be controlled with painkillers you can buy yourself. Tamoxifen may cause dizziness. Let your doctor or nurse know if this is a problem.

• Joint and muscle pain

You may have pain and stiffness in your joints, and sometimes in your muscles while taking tamoxifen. Let your doctor or nurse know if this happens. They can prescribe painkillers and give you advice. Being

physically active and maintaining a healthy weight can help reduce joint pain and keep your joints flexible.

- **Fatigue**

You may feel tired, sleepy or feel like you have no energy when you start taking tamoxifen. Try to pace yourself until this improves. It's important to get the right balance of having enough rest and being physically active. Regular short walks will help you to feel less tired. If you feel sleepy, don't drive or operate machinery.

- **Raised blood pressure**

Tell your doctor if you have ever had problems with your blood pressure. Your doctor or nurse will check your blood pressure in clinic.

- **Raised cholesterol levels**

Your doctor may check your cholesterol levels with a blood test.

- **Taste changes**

Occasionally during treatment you may experience a strange taste. A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this.

- **Pins and needles**

Tamoxifen can affect the nervous system. You may have pins and needles or feel tingling in your arms and legs. If this becomes a problem tell your doctor or nurse.

- **Skin rash**

You may get a mild skin rash. Tell your doctor or nurse if this happens. It is very important to contact your doctor straightaway if you get a severe skin rash.

- **Hair thinning**

Your hair may become thinner while taking tamoxifen. This is usually mild. Your hair will get thicker after treatment finishes.

- **Weight changes**

You may put on weight when you are taking tamoxifen. Eating healthily and being more physically active can help to keep you at a healthy weight. You may find that you get some fluid retention. If this becomes a problem, speak with your doctor or nurse who can give you more advice.

- **Mood changes**

Some people have mood changes or feel low or depressed when taking tamoxifen. You may also find it harder to think clearly or to concentrate. Let your doctor or nurse know if this is a problem, especially if you feel low most of the time or think you may be depressed.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Blood clots**

Tamoxifen can increase your chances of getting a blood clot. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have ever had a blood clot or a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

A blood clot can cause pain, redness and swelling in a leg or arm, breathlessness and chest pain. Contact your doctor straightaway if you have any of these symptoms. A blood clot is serious but your doctor can treat it with drugs that thin the blood. Your doctor or nurse can give you more information.

- **Abdominal pain**

Tell your doctor if you have any persistent lower abdominal pain or pressure or any unexplained vaginal bleeding.

- **Liver changes**

Tamoxifen can sometimes cause changes in the way your liver works. Your doctor will arrange for you to have regular blood tests to check your liver is working properly. You are very unlikely to notice any problems.

Sex, contraception and fertility

Protecting your partner and contraception:

We recommend that you or your partner use a condom during sexual intercourse while you are receiving this treatment. If you suspect that you may be pregnant please tell your doctor immediately.

Fertility:

Your doctor will advise you not to become pregnant when you are taking tamoxifen. This is because tamoxifen may harm a developing baby. For women, it is important to use an effective, non-hormonal form of contraception during treatment and for a few months after it finishes. Even if your periods have stopped or are irregular, you still need to use contraception. Your doctor or nurse can tell you more about this.

Women who have not been through the menopause may still be able to get pregnant after treatment. But some women go through their natural menopause during treatment. Doctors usually advise you to wait for a few months after tamoxifen treatment finishes before you try to get pregnant. Talk to your doctor first if you are thinking of trying to become pregnant.

Late side effects

Some side effects may become evident only after a number of years. In reaching any decision with you about treatment, the potential benefit you receive from treatment will be weighed against the risks of serious long term side effects to the heart, lungs, kidneys and bone marrow. With some drugs there is also a small but definite risk of developing another cancer. If any of these problems specifically applies to you, the doctor will discuss these with you and note this on your consent form.

Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please ring the area where you are having treatment:

- Administration enquiries **0161 918 7606/7610**
- Chemotherapy nurse **0161 918 7171**

For advice ring The Christie Hotline on 0161 446 3658 (24 hours).

Your consultant is:

Your hospital number is:

Your key worker is:

Notes:

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

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We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

