

Letrozole

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 letrozole.

Treatment: Letrozole 2.5mg 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 letrozole 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. Letrozole blocks oestrogen from reaching the cancer cells. This means the cancer may grow more slowly or stop growing altogether.

In women, after the menopause, oestrogen is no longer made in the ovaries. Instead, it is made in the fatty tissues of the body. This happens when an enzyme (a type of protein) called aromatase changes other hormones into oestrogen. Letrozole is a type of drug called an aromatase inhibitor. It blocks (inhibits) the activity of aromatase and reduces the amount of oestrogen in the body.

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.

- **Bone fracture**

Taking letrozole for a few years increases your risk of bone thinning, called osteoporosis. This can increase your risk of a broken bone (fracture). You will usually have a bone density scan to check your bone health before and during treatment. If you are at risk of osteoporosis, your doctor may prescribe drugs called bisphosphonates to protect your bones. They will also usually advise you to take calcium and vitamin D supplements. Regular walking, eating a healthy diet, not smoking and sticking to sensible drinking guidelines will also help to strengthen your bones.

- **Fatigue**

You may feel tired, sleepy or feel like you have no energy when you start taking letrozole. 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.

- **Joint and muscle pain**

You may have pain and stiffness in your joints, and sometimes in your muscles while taking letrozole. 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 them flexible.

- **Sickness and diarrhoea**

Any sickness is usually mild, but let your doctor know if this happens. Letrozole 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.

- **Increase in appetite/weight gain**

Some women find their appetite increases. Eating healthily and being physically active will help if you have concerns about your weight. Alternatively if you don't have much appetite, try eating small, frequent meals or snacks. If problems with eating don't get better talk to your doctor or nurse.

- **Skin rash and dry skin**

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.

- **Headache and dizziness**

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

- **Vaginal bleeding and dryness**

For some women letrozole 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 letrozole. If the bleeding continues for more than a few days, tell your doctor or nurse.

For some women, letrozole 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 letrozole. Talk to your doctor or nurse for advice.

- **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.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Insomnia**

These tablets may cause sleep disturbance. If this becomes a problem tell your doctor or nurse.

- **Depression/anxiety**

Some people find they have a low mood whilst taking letrozole. Some people may have problems concentrating, feel anxious or have difficulty sleeping. Talk to your nurse or doctor if you have these changes so they can give you support and advice.

- **Urinary infection**

Let your doctor know if you have pain or discomfort when you pass urine, if you need to pass urine more often, or if your urine is cloudy or smelly. Drink lots of fluids if you think you may have an infection.

- **Eye irritation/blurred vision**

Some people get sore eyes or blurred vision whilst taking letrozole. Always tell your doctor or nurse if you notice any change in your vision.

- **Sore mouth and strange taste**

Whilst taking this treatment your mouth may become sore. To prevent infection you should use an antibacterial mouthwash (Chlorhexidine). Ask your doctor or nurse for advice. Occasionally during treatment you may experience a strange taste, sometimes described as metallic or bitter. A strongly flavoured sweet or mint will help to disguise this.

- **Chest tightness or pain**

If you notice changes to your heartbeat, such as it speeding up, let your doctor know. If you have pain or tightness in your chest, or feel breathless at any time during or after treatment, see a doctor straightaway.

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.

© 2018 The Christie NHS Foundation Trust. This document may be copied for use within the NHS only on the condition that The Christie NHS Foundation Trust is acknowledged as the creator.

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

