

Anastrozole

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 anastrozole.

Treatment: Anastrozole 1mg 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 anastrozole 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.

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. Anastrozole 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

Hormone 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.

- **Joint and muscle pain**

You may have pain and stiffness in your joints, and sometimes in your muscles while taking anastrozole. 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.

- **Fatigue**

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

- **Sickness and diarrhoea**

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

- **Appetite and weight change**

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.

- **Taste changes**

You may get a bitter or metallic taste in your mouth or find that food tastes different. This should go away when your treatment finishes. Your doctor or nurse can give you more advice.

- **Headaches and dizziness**

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

- **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.**

- **Hair thinning**

Your hair may become thinner while taking anastrozole. Your hair will get thicker after treatment finishes.

- **Vaginal bleeding and dryness**

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

- **Pain, numbness and tingling in the hands and fingers**

These symptoms may be due to carpal tunnel syndrome which is caused by pressure on a nerve in the wrist. It is more common in people taking anastrozole. Tell your doctor if you have these symptoms.

- **Raised cholesterol levels**

Anastrozole can raise the level of cholesterol (a fatty substance) in your blood. Your doctor may check this with a blood test.

- **Liver changes**

Anastrozole 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.

- **Bone fracture**

Taking anastrozole 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.

Uncommon side effects (less than 1 in 10)

- **Sleepiness or drowsiness**

These tablets may cause sleepiness or make you feel drowsy. If this becomes a problem tell your doctor or nurse.

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 apply 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

