

# 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 clinical team will be happy to answer any questions you have about your treatment.

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.

## Your treatment

Your clinical team has prescribed for you a treatment which includes the hormonal therapy tamoxifen.

**Treatment:** Tamoxifen tablets are 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.

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.

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 clinical team 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.

Many of the over the counter preparations that can be bought for menopausal symptoms are not suitable for patients with a history of breast cancer. Please consult your medical team before starting any new medication or herbal supplements. 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 clinical team.

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 clinical team 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 clinical team for advice.

### • Sickness and diarrhoea

Any sickness is usually mild, but let your clinical team 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 clinical team 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 clinical team.

### • Headaches and dizziness

If you have headaches, let your clinical team know. They can usually be controlled with painkillers you can buy yourself. Tamoxifen may cause dizziness. Let your clinical team 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 clinical team 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.

- **Raised blood pressure**

Tell your clinical team 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 clinical team 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 clinical team.

- **Skin rash**

You may get a mild skin rash. Tell your clinical team 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 clinical team 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 clinical team 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 clinical team straightaway if you have any of these symptoms. A blood clot is serious but your clinical team can treat it with drugs that thin the blood. Your clinical team can give you more information.

- **Abdominal pain**

Tell your clinical team 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 clinical team will arrange for you to have regular blood tests to check your liver is working properly. You are very unlikely to notice any problems.

## Flu vaccinations

We advise that all patients receive a flu vaccination when this is offered.

## COVID-19 vaccinations

We advise that all patients receive a COVID-19 vaccination when this is offered.

However, if you are thinking of having other vaccinations please ask your Christie clinical team as some vaccines should be avoided.

## 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 a member of your medical team immediately.

We advise you not to become pregnant when you are having tamoxifen. This is because tamoxifen may harm a developing baby. For women it is important to use an effective, non-hormonal barrier 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. A member of your clinical team can tell you more about this.

## Contacts

If you have any general questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact your consultant's secretary or breast cancer nurse.

For advice ring The Christie Hotline on **0161 446 3658** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Your consultant is: .....

Your hospital number is: .....

Your key worker is: .....

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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.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham, Salford or Macclesfield. 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