

Patient information

Tamoxifen Treatment for Cyclical Breast Pain

Breast Services

What is Tamoxifen?

Tamoxifen is a tablet that may be used to treat cyclical breast pain. This is usually used to treat breast cancer, however, this is not the reason you are being given this tablet.

How does Tamoxifen work?

Tamoxifen works on the female hormones (oestrogen), which work on the breast tissue.

How much Tamoxifen do I need to take?

Your hospital doctor will ask you to take:

Either: One 10mg tablet Tamoxifen each day in the second half of your menstrual cycle (on days 15 to 25 of your cycle).

OR One 10mg tablet every day. Your doctor will explain this to you.

You will probably be asked to stop the tablets after six months treatment, to see how you go without treatment.

Are there any side effects to Tamoxifen?

The following side effects are possible:

- Hot flushes.
- Periods may become lighter or stop.
- Nausea (feeling sick) (try taking tablet each evening to reduce chance of this happening).
- Headaches or feeling light headed.
- Some general swelling / bloating.
- Hair thinning.
- Skin rashes.
- Fibroids in the womb.
- Changes in eye sight (such as cataracts).

More serious side effects are:

- Increased risk of blood clots (in legs or chest) – please read “travel advice” and “having an operation” advice below.
- Increased risk of developing cancer of lining of womb (very rare for short length of treatment for breast pain).

There are several side effects listed here, but with using a low strength of tablet and a short course of treatment, most women should have few if any of these side effects.

Can Tamoxifen be given to anyone?

Tamoxifen has been shown in several studies to be an effective treatment for cyclical breast pain.

However, it is not licensed to treat breast pain, but your doctor can prescribe it for you if he or she thinks you will benefit from trying it.

For this reason, your doctor will have tried other treatments first, before trying Tamoxifen.

Tamoxifen should not be used by anyone:

- Who has had blood clot in the legs (DVT) or chest (pulmonary embolus) or a stroke.
- Who is pregnant, or may be pregnant, or is breastfeeding.
(It is important that you do not become pregnant while taking this treatment. If you or your partner have not been sterilised or you have not had a hysterectomy, you may need to change to a non-hormonal method of contraception such as condom, diaphragm or coil (you should not take the contraceptive pill). You may like to see your family planning doctor or nurse or family doctor (GP) about finding a method to suit you.
- Who is currently also having investigations for other gynaecology problems.
- Who is known to have porphyria.

Travel Advice

Tamoxifen is known to slightly increase the risk of some people getting a blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis - DVT), chest (pulmonary embolism - PE), or brain (stroke).

Day to day, the risk of you getting a blood clot is very small, but the risk particularly in post-menopausal women may increase if you rest for long periods for example if you stay in bed for several days after an operation or if you travel long distances and are sitting for a long time (such as flights lasting six hours or longer).

To reduce the chance of getting a blood clot when travelling you should do the following:

- Drink plenty (water, juice or non alcoholic drinks).
- Get up and walk around as often as possible during travelling. If this is not possible do some leg exercises like “walking on the spot” while sitting, and wiggling your feet.
- Wearing support socks or tights may be helpful.

Some people may also like to try the following.

- Take one low-strength (75mg tablet) Aspirin each day for up to a week before and after flight travel. You must not take Aspirin if you have had a stomach or duodenal ulcer (or stomach bleed). If you take any regular medication please ask your doctor or pharmacist if you may take Aspirin also. (**Please note:** Aspirin is not licensed as a drug to prevent blood clots when travelling).
- Stop smoking.

If travelling or resting for long periods and you find your leg becomes painful, swollen or warm to touch, please ask a doctor to check you do not have a blood clot - as soon as you have any of these symptoms.

If you suddenly become breathless or have a pain in the chest, or cough up some blood – ask a doctor to see you.

In the unlikely event you get a blood clot, treatment is best the sooner it starts. Treatment is simple and can be very effective.

Please remember most patients taking Tamoxifen will never have a blood clot. However, if you follow the advice given by your doctor you are less likely to have a problem when travelling and have a safe, enjoyable holiday.

Having an operation

If you are having a planned operation it is wise to stop Tamoxifen for six weeks before and after your operation.

If you have an emergency operation or have a fracture (broken bone) of the leg, it is wise to stop Tamoxifen for at least six weeks. Please talk to your doctor about this.

What should I do if my breast pain returns?

Tamoxifen usually works well to treat breast pain. In a few women the breast pain may come back after you have been free of pain for some time. If this should happen, please discuss this with your doctor.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further Information

Breast Nurse Practitioners

Tel: 0151 706 2931

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2931

Breast Care Nurses

Tel: 0151 706 2927

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2927

Your Family Doctor (GP) or Practice Nurse

Breast Cancer Care

Tel: 0808 800 6000

www.breastcancer care.org.uk

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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