



OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Irish Cancer Society

43-45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4.
Helpline Freefone:
1 800 200 700
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

Reach to Recovery

43-45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4.
Helpline Freefone:
1800 30 90 40

Quinn Healthcare,

Mill House
Fermoy
Co. Cork
Phone: 1890 700890
Web: www.quinn-healthcare.com

Hibernian Health

PO BOX 764, Freepost,
Togher,
Co. Cork
LoCall: 1850 716666
Email:
support@hibernianhealthinsurance.ie
Website:
www.hibernianhealth.com

Voluntary Health Insurance

VHI House
Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1.
Callsave: 1800 44 44 44
Email: info@vhi.ie
Web: www.vhi.ie

Action Breast Cancer

43 -45 Northumberland Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4
Freefone: 1800 30 90 40
E-mail ABC@irishcancer.ie
Web: www.cancer.ie/action

USEFUL WEBSITES

Irish Cancer Society

www.cancer.ie

Breast Cancer Care UK

www.breastcancercare.org.uk

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

The Susan G. Komen Foundation

www.komen.org

Europa Donna

www.cancereurope.org/europadonna

ABC - ACTION BREAST CANCER

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, is the leading provider of breast cancer information and support in Ireland. Each year we reach over 25,000 women who are concerned about breast cancer or breast health. Our services are free and include:

- National Breast Cancer Helpline 1800 30 90 40 - staffed by specialist cancer nurses
- Patient care programmes - providing emotional support and practical assistance for those living with breast cancer
- Health promotion - providing community and workplace programmes on breast awareness and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Advocacy - providing a voice for those affected by breast cancer in Ireland
- Professional support - complementing the services offered by those caring for breast cancer patients
- Research - funding vital Irish research that will have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

ABC is funded entirely by donations from the public. If you would like to support our work or make a donation please contact us.

action
breast
cancer

a programme of
irish cancer society

Freefone Helpline
1800 30 90 40

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FACTSHEET



information on **drug therapy**

Aromasin (exemestane)

This factsheet explains briefly what Aromasin is, how it works, what the benefits are, and what side effects may occur. Aromasin is the brand name of the drug, which is used throughout this factsheet. Most people know it by this name, although its generic (non-branded) name is exemestane.

WHAT IS AROMASIN?

Aromasin is a drug used to treat breast cancer in post-menopausal women (women who have gone through the menopause/change of life). It is a type of hormone treatment and is known as an aromatase inhibitor.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Some breast cancers rely on the female hormone oestrogen for their growth. This means that in post-menopausal women with these types of breast cancers, oestrogen can encourage the tumour to grow. An enzyme known as aromatase, which is found in the liver and fatty tissue, converts other hormones called androgens into

oestrogen. Aromasin works by stopping this conversion from taking place so the amount of oestrogen circulating in the body is reduced.

WHEN IS AROMASIN PRESCRIBED?

There are different types of breast cancer and not all of them respond to Aromasin. Aromasin is most useful for breast cancers that rely on



oestrogen for their growth (oestrogen receptor positive tumours).

Aromasin may be prescribed if your breast cancer comes back or progresses while you are taking tamoxifen.

Aromasin may be given as part of a Clinical Trial.

WILL IT STILL WORK FOR ME IF I HAVE BEEN TAKING TAMOXIFEN?

If you have responded to a hormone therapy before, there is a good chance you will respond to a different type of hormone therapy. Trials have shown that Aromasin can be effective in women who have previously responded to Tamoxifen and other hormone treatments. A clinical trial is currently looking at whether changing to Aromasin after two to three years on Tamoxifen is better than taking Tamoxifen for five years.

HOW IS AROMASIN TAKEN?

Aromasin comes as a tablet (25mg) that you take once a day, preferably after a meal. It is best to take it at the same time each day. If you miss a dose you don't need to take a replacement dose as the drug will remain in your system from the previous day.

Store Aromasin tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat and light and moisture.

HOW LONG WILL I HAVE TO TAKE AROMASIN?

This will vary from person to person. You will usually continue to take the drug for as long as it is keeping your cancer under control. Your specialist will discuss with you how long you need to carry on taking it. If for any reason you want to stop taking Aromasin, it is important to consult your specialist first.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF AROMASIN?

Everyone reacts to drugs differently and some people experience more side effects than others. The known side effects of Aromasin are listed below. It is important to remember that you may not get any of these. If you experience any side effects that you are concerned about, talk to your specialist or breast care nurse. Aromasin can increase the risk of bone thinning (osteoporosis) so you may be started on Calcium and Vitamin D supplements.

More common side effects

You may have symptoms such as nausea and vomiting which can sometimes be helped by taking your tablet with food. If the symptoms don't improve, talk to your specialist as there are other ways of controlling these side effects. Another common side effect is tiredness.

As with most hormonal treatments, you may have menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes. You can do practical things to help yourself such as wearing cotton clothing and reducing your intake of caffeine and alcohol.

For further information see Action Breast Cancer's **Understanding and Managing Menopausal Symptoms** factsheet.



Less common side effects

These include increased perspiration, constipation, increased appetite, weight gain, insomnia (sleeplessness) and feeling low.

Rare side effects

You are unlikely to experience any of these side effects but it may still be helpful to be aware of them. These include flu-like symptoms, abdominal discomfort, raised blood pressure, breathlessness or coughing.

CAN I TAKE AROMASIN WITH OTHER DRUGS?

It is not advisable to take other drugs containing oestrogen, such as the contraceptive pill or HRT, while you are taking Aromasin.

Other drugs thought to reduce the effectiveness of Aromasin include:

- The Anti - Tuberculosis (TB) drug rifampicine
- The Anti -convulsants Phrnytoin Sodium and Carbamazepine
- The herbal remedy St. John's Wort.

Please tell your doctor and dentist that you are being treated with Aromasin before having any treatment with them.

FURTHER SUPPORT AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

If you have any concerns about taking Aromasin you can talk to your specialist or breast care nurse. You might find it easier to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience to you. Reach to Recovery is a programme set up to help and support women who have recently had a breast cancer diagnosis. The programme works on the principle of personal contact between the patient and a Reach to Recovery volunteer – a woman who has had treatment for breast cancer. Carefully selected and fully trained volunteers are available to provide advice and reassurance at a time when a woman is most in need of both. For more information on individual support or support groups in your area, call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 30 90 40.

HELP FROM ACTION BREAST CANCER

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, provides breast cancer information and support, and funds breast cancer research. Our services are free, confidential and accessible.

For more information call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on Freefone 1800 30 90 40 or visit www.cancer.ie