

Exemestane

Aromasin®

Cancer-directed **hormonal** therapy in tablets

Understanding your treatment

What is a hormonal therapy?

Hormonal therapy slows the growth of cancers that use natural hormones (for example: estrogen, progesterone and testosterone) to grow. Hormonal therapy can either stop the body from producing the hormones that cause cancer growth or it may prevent the use of the hormones by the cancer cells.

Hormonal therapy can be used alone or in combination with other treatments such as a targeted therapy.

How can hormonal therapy help you?

Depending on your type of cancer and the stage of the disease, hormonal therapy can be used to :

- **Destroy** cancer cells
- **Stop** the cancer from spreading
- **Slow** the growth of cancer cells

How will you feel while on hormonal therapy?

Hormonal therapy changes the hormone levels in your body. Side effects that are caused by the decrease of hormones can arise at any time during your treatment.

Not everyone has side effects and each person's experience may be different. Side effects and their severity are not representative of hormonal therapy's effectiveness or lack thereof.

This document is about the most frequent side effects caused by your hormonal therapy.

Medication

Exemestane

Tablets to take by mouth

Administration

To be taken once daily with food

On a continuous basis



- A **blood test** will be done during your treatment. Depending on the results and side effects of the previous treatment, the dose of the medication might be interrupted if needed.
- Some tests might be done to verify the health of your **bones**. Exemestane could increase the risk of developing osteoporosis and fractures. You could be prescribed vitamin D and calcium in order to maintain your bones in good condition. It is important that you eat calcium-rich foods (yogurt, cheese, milk, etc.).

How to take your medication?

- Take your exemestane tablets as prescribed once daily at the same time every day with food.
- Tablets must be taken whole. Do not chew, split or crush the tablets.
- **If you forget a dose**, you may take it as soon as you remember but do not double the next dose. However, try to take your pills at the same time every day and in the same way (with food).

Storing and handling your medicines



- Wash your hands immediately after handling your tablets.
- Keep your medication at room temperature, out of the reach of children and pets as well as protected from light, heat or moisture. Do not keep medicines in the bathroom.
- Don't throw away unused medication at home. Bring it back to your pharmacy to be destroyed safely. You may dispose of the empty containers in your home garbage can.
- Pregnant women or women who are wanting to become pregnant should not touch the exemestane tablets. Caregivers should wear disposable gloves if they prepare medication for you. You can find disposable gloves at your local community pharmacy.
- Keep your medications in their original container and do not mix them with other drugs. The container should never be reused to put other objects or food.

How can this treatment affect your daily life?

Fatigue and alcohol



- You may experience **fatigue** during your treatments. This is usually temporary and may be related to different reasons (medication, stress, the disease). Maintain a good level of activity but rest when you feel the need to.
- **Alcohol** in small quantities is allowed and will not affect the efficacy of the treatment.

Sex life and birth control



- You can have an **active sexual** life during your treatments. However, a decrease in your sexual drive may occur during this period. This may also be influenced by different factors (fatigue, stress, etc.).
- It's safe to kiss, to touch, to hold hands, to sleep in the same bed and to cuddle.
- It is usually not necessary for **women** to use contraception while on this treatment as it

typically given to menopausal women. However, this medication could be harmful to a fetus should a pregnancy occur.

- For **male patients**, the treatment may affect the sperm and it may be harmful to the embryo.
 - If you have sex with a woman of child-bearing age, a birth control method is strongly recommended during treatments.
 - Notify your doctor immediately if you had unprotected sex and your partner is pregnant.

Tips and medicines to avoid



- Exemestane works by decreasing the quantity of **estrogen** in your blood. It is therefore important to avoid taking products containing hormones to treat menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, vaginal dryness, etc. Some natural remedies also contain ingredients that have hormone-like effects. If you are considering taking such products, consult your pharmacist who will evaluate if it is safe for you to use them.
- **Over the counter medicines, natural health products and vaccines**
Consult your healthcare team:
 - if you intend to take any other medication (with or without a prescription) or natural health products.
 - if you need to receive a vaccine.This could decrease your treatment's efficacy or increase its side effects.
- **Always have on hand the complete list of your medications**
Be sure to always have on hand the complete list of your medications, dietary supplements, vitamins and other natural health products. Give it to your doctor and your pharmacist. It is important to make them aware of any change.



What are the side effects of your treatment?

This fact sheet aims to let you know the side effects most commonly seen following the administration of your treatment. Please note that when you take any medication, there is a possibility that it causes rare side effects and it is difficult to predict which patients will be affected.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

MANAGEMENT

Hot flashes

You may experience hot flashes. These effects vary between individuals and usually go away with time.

- Take your medication at bedtime.
- However, if the hot flashes disturb your sleep, take your medication in the morning. Do not forget to consult your pharmacist before taking natural remedies; they could decrease the efficacy of your treatment.
- If these symptoms persist over time or are bothering you, speak with your healthcare team that will recommend appropriate measures.

Muscle and bone pain

You may experience muscle, bone and joint pain and cramps that may occur during your treatment.

- If you present with bone or muscle pain, speak with a member of your healthcare team who will recommend an appropriate pain reliever.

Vaginal dryness

You may experience itchiness or vaginal dryness.

- If this is bothering you, consult your pharmacist who could recommend some creams.

Nausea

Rarely, slight nausea may occur.

- Contact a member of your healthcare team if you have nausea that bothers you.

Hair loss

Usually there is **no hair loss** with this treatment.

- Use gentle shampoo.
- In order to slow hair loss, avoid brushing hair vigorously.
- Avoid hair spray, dyes and perms.

However, depending on the individual, **thinning of the hair** may occur. However, don't worry; your hair will grow back after treatments have ended.

RARE ADVERSE EFFECTS THAT CAN BE SEVERE OR SERIOUS

If the following side effects occur, stop your treatment and call your healthcare team as quickly as possible or go to the Emergency Room:

- Pain with or without warmth and redness on the calves or the legs accompanied by sudden difficulty breathing

PHARMACIST: _____

PHONE: _____

FROM ____ H____ TO ____ H____ (MONDAY TO FRIDAY)

This fact sheet has been prepared by a sub-committee of the Comité national de l'évolution de la pratique des soins pharmaceutiques of the Programme québécois de cancérologie of the Ministry of Health and Social Services in consultation with the Comité de l'évolution de la pratique en oncologie of the Institut national d'excellence en santé et en services sociaux.

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