

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Trastuzumab for the adjuvant treatment of early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about when trastuzumab should be used to treat women with early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for women with breast cancer but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe breast cancer or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.



What has NICE said about trastuzumab?

Trastuzumab treatment should be offered as an option for women with early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer after they have had surgery and chemotherapy (and sometimes radiotherapy).

Trastuzumab should be given once every 3 weeks for 12 months, or until the breast cancer comes back, whichever is sooner.

Trastuzumab treatment has been associated with heart problems. Before trastuzumab is prescribed a woman should have tests to check how well her heart is working. The tests should be repeated every 3 months during treatment. If a woman develops heart problems while taking trastuzumab her treatment will be stopped.

Trastuzumab should not be offered to women with certain heart problems or with high blood pressure that is not well controlled with drugs or other treatment.

Early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer

Breast cancer is described as 'early stage' if the cancer is only in the breast and the lymph nodes under the arm, and has not spread to other parts of the body. 'HER2 positive' means that there are high levels of HER2 proteins on the surface of the breast cancer cells. A growth factor produced naturally in the body attaches itself to the HER2 protein which makes the cancer grow.

A test can be done to find out if your breast cancer is HER2 positive. About one in five women with breast cancer have the HER2-positive form.

Trastuzumab

Trastuzumab (also known as Herceptin) is a monoclonal antibody drug. Trastuzumab attaches itself to the HER2 protein on the cancer cells and stops them from growing. Trastuzumab will only work in people who have HER2-positive breast cancer. Trastuzumab is used for the adjuvant treatment of breast cancer after surgery and chemotherapy (and sometimes radiotherapy). Adjuvant treatment is extra treatment that is given after surgery to remove the cancer. Adjuvant treatment aims to kill any remaining cancer cells or stop the cancer from growing back.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. So, if you have early-stage HER2-positive breast cancer, and your specialist thinks that trastuzumab is the right treatment for you, you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you appear to be eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

This may not be the only possible treatment for early-stage breast cancer. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

More information about breast cancer

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with breast cancer. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Breakthrough Breast Cancer, Freephone 08080 100 200, www.breakthrough.org.uk
- Breast Cancer Care, Freephone 0808 800 6000, www.breastcancercare.org.uk
- Cancerbackup, Freephone 0808 800 1234, www.cancerbackup.org.uk

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may also be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/ITA107

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1112).