

Paclitaxel for the adjuvant treatment of early node-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 paclitaxel should be used to treat women with early node-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 page 3.



What has NICE said about paclitaxel?

Paclitaxel is not recommended as an option for the adjuvant treatment of women with early node-positive breast cancer.

Early node-positive breast cancer

Breast cancer is described as 'early' 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. 'Node-positive' means that the cancer has been found in these underarm lymph nodes.

Paclitaxel

Paclitaxel (also known as Taxol) is a taxane, a type of drug (medicine) used for chemotherapy. It works by stopping cancer cells from dividing, which prevents the cancer from growing, and by killing some cancer cells. Paclitaxel is licensed for use after chemotherapy with an anthracycline and cyclophosphamide for the adjuvant treatment of breast cancer. However, this use of paclitaxel is not recommended by NICE. Adjuvant treatment is extra treatment that is given after surgery to remove a cancer. Adjuvant treatment aims to kill any remaining cancer cells or stop the cancer from growing back.

There are several possible treatments for early breast cancer. Your healthcare team should talk to you about the treatment options available.

What does this mean for me?

There is not enough reliable evidence that paclitaxel is more effective than standard treatments for early node-positive breast cancer. This means that for the time being it should not be prescribed routinely on the NHS. Your specialist should talk to you about other treatment options available to you.

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/TA108

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1104).

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

MidCity Place, 71 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6NA; www.nice.org.uk

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