

Hormonal therapies for the adjuvant treatment of early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer

This leaflet is about when **anastrozole, exemestane and letrozole** should be used to treat people with early oestrogen-receptor-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 early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

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

It does not describe early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer or the treatments in detail – your cancer specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on page 4.



What has NICE said?

Anastrozole, exemestane and letrozole are recommended as possible treatments for women who have a type of breast cancer called early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer and have been through the menopause. Anastrozole, exemestane or letrozole may be given as an 'extra' treatment (called an adjuvant treatment), after the woman has had an operation to remove the cancer, to help to stop the cancer coming back.

The woman and her doctor should discuss the risks and benefits of each treatment before deciding which one to choose. This discussion should include whether the woman has already taken a similar medicine called tamoxifen, whether each of the medicines is suitable for her, the possible unwanted effects of each drug and how likely it is that the woman's breast cancer will come back.

Early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer

Breast cancer is cancer affecting the breast tissue. If the cancer is only in the breast and lymph nodes under the arm, and the lump in the breast is smaller than 5 cm, it is called early breast cancer.

For some women, the female hormone oestrogen stimulates breast cancer cells to grow. This type of breast cancer is known as oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer.

These may not be the only possible treatments for early oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether they are suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

Hormonal therapies

Anastrozole, exemestane and letrozole are medicines that may be given to women with oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer who have been through the menopause. Women generally take the medicine for 5 years after the operation to remove their cancer. These medicines are called hormonal therapies because they work by lowering the amount of oestrogen in the body. This means that any cancer cells left in the body are less likely to grow.

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 oestrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer, and your doctor thinks that anastrozole, exemestane or letrozole 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.

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, 0808 010 0200, www.breakthrough.org.uk
- Breast Cancer Care, 0808 800 6000, www.breastcancercare.org.uk
- Cancerbackup, 0808 800 1234, www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Cancer Voices, 020 7091 2006, www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 2020, www.macmillan.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/TA112

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1151).

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