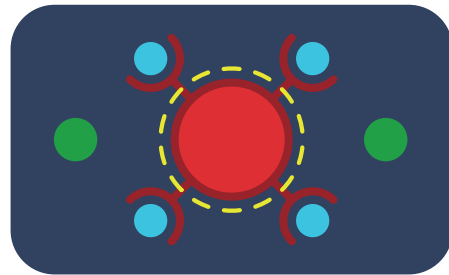


Helping patients on types of
cancer treatment in the pharmacy

Understanding hormone therapies



What they are

Many hormone therapies are chemical compounds that have a similar structure to hormones made naturally in our body. For example, tamoxifen which is used to treat patients with breast cancer, has a very similar structure to the natural hormone oestrogen. Other hormone therapies interfere with the chemical steps our bodies use to manufacture a hormone. For example, abiraterone, a treatment which is used to treat patient with prostate cancer, interferes with the way the body makes testosterone.



How they work

Hormone therapies either work by:

- Reducing the amount of a hormone in the body, or
- Blocking the actions of a hormone inside cancer cells

Almost all prostate cancers rely on the hormone testosterone to help them grow and multiply. In a similar way, most breast cancers need oestrogen. Hormone therapies are therefore an important treatment option for patients with cancer where hormones influence cell development.



Potential side effects

Patients taking hormone therapies often use these treatments for long periods of time, sometimes several years. People taking hormone therapies often say that the side effects settle down over time. Some side effects are common to all hormone therapies, but some vary between the various drugs.

Common side effects of hormone therapies which affect oestrogen

These hormone therapies often cause menopausal type symptoms such as irregular/absent menstrual cycles, vaginal dryness, hot flushes and sweating. They can also cause digestive problems, hair thinning, joint pains, weight gain, headaches and memory problems. They can also cause patients bones to become more fragile with an increased risk of fractures.

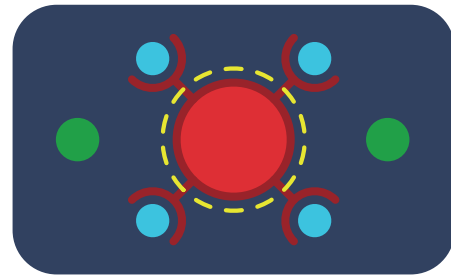
They are also linked to an increased risk of blood clots. Patients should be aware of the symptoms, which include; pain, redness or swelling in the legs, and/or sudden breathlessness or increased need to cough. Patients may report seeing bloody mucus discharge after they cough.

Common side effects of hormone therapies which affect testosterone

These hormone therapies often cause tiredness, hot flushes and sweating, breast tenderness, weight gain, mood swings, erectile dysfunction and depression. They can also cause patients bones to become more fragile with an increased risk of fractures.

The full Let's Communicate Cancer course is available by clicking [here](#)

Understanding hormone therapies



Support in assessing the severity of side effects, treatment recommendations and referral criteria

Guidance regarding assessment of the severity of side effects, alongside OTC treatment recommendations and referral criteria are available in factsheet series 2.

These factsheets cover the following topics: diarrhoea, constipation, nausea and vomiting, peripheral neuropathy, rashes and mucositis.

- diarrhoea
- constipation
- nausea and vomiting
- peripheral neuropathy
- rashes
- mucositis



Please be aware that comprehensive information regarding individual cancer therapies is available from the **Macmillan website**

The full Let's Communicate Cancer course is available by clicking [here](#)