



## FACTSHEET

a programme of  
 irish cancer society

information on **drug therapy**

# Arimidex (anastrozole)

This factsheet explains briefly what Arimidex is, how it works, when it may be prescribed, what the benefits are, and what side effects may occur. Most people know the drug by this name, although its generic (general) name is anastrozole.

### WHAT IS ARIMIDEX AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Arimidex is a drug used to treat breast cancer in post-menopausal women (women who have gone through the menopause/change of life). It is a type of hormone treatment known as an aromatase inhibitor.

The female hormone oestrogen stimulates some breast cancers to grow. These are described as hormone sensitive or receptor positive tumours.

Post-menopausal women do continue to produce oestrogen. This is mostly produced when other hormones are converted into oestrogen by an enzyme known as aromatase, which is found in the liver and the fatty tissues of the body. Arimidex works by stopping this conversion from taking place so that the amount of oestrogen circulating in the body is reduced.

### WHEN IS ARIMIDEX PRESCRIBED?

There are different types of breast cancer and not all of them respond to Arimidex. Arimidex is most useful for breast cancers that rely on oestrogen for their growth (oestrogen receptor-positive tumours) and it is only suitable for women who have been through the menopause.

Arimidex may be used to treat primary breast cancer in women

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who are unable to take tamoxifen because of the potential risk of side effects. It may be given in combination with tamoxifen within a clinical trial.

Arimidex may also be prescribed if you develop local recurrence or secondary breast cancer while you are taking tamoxifen or other anti-oestrogen hormones.

You will not usually be given Arimidex if you have osteoporosis (thinning and weakening of the bones) because of the risk of further damage to the bone.

### **HOW IS ARIMIDEX TAKEN?**

Arimidex comes as a tablet (1 mg) that you take once a day. It is best to take it at the same time every day. If you miss a dose you don't need to take an extra dose the next day. The level of the drug in your body will remain high from the previous day. It is important not to stop taking Arimidex without talking to your specialist first. Store Arimidex tablets out of reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light and moisture.

### **WILL IT STILL WORK FOR ME EVEN THOUGH I HAVE BEEN TAKING TAMOXIFEN?**

If you have responded to one type of hormone treatment there is a good chance that you will respond to another. Trials have shown that Arimidex is useful for women who have had a good initial response to tamoxifen.

### **HOW LONG WILL I HAVE TO TAKE ARIMIDEX?**

If you have primary breast cancer you will take Arimidex for five years. For local recurrence or secondary disease you will continue to take it for as long as your breast cancer remains under control. If your breast cancer does progress while you are taking Arimidex, there are other hormone treatments that may be effective.

### **WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF ARIMIDEX?**

Everyone reacts differently to drugs. Some people experience more side effects than others. Arimidex usually causes only a few side effects that can be kept under control. It is rare for someone to stop taking Arimidex because of the side effects.

The known side effects of Arimidex are listed below. It is important to remember that you may not get any of these. Tell Doctors or Dentists that you

are being treated with Arimidex before you are treated.

Arimidex has lactose in it. The amount is very small but may rarely cause some gastric upset in persons who are lactose intolerant.

### **More common side effects**

You may have symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite or diarrhoea. These symptoms tend to be mild and temporary and can usually be helped by taking your tablets with food or at bedtime.

Tiredness may also be a problem for some women, and you may find you need more rest than usual. For a copy of our booklet **Coping with Fatigue**, please call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freephone 1800 30 90 40.

You may have menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes. These also tend to be mild and generally wear off after a while. You can do practical things to help yourself such as wearing cotton clothing and reducing your intake of caffeine and alcohol. Some people find complementary therapies helpful, for example reflexology.

Another menopausal symptom you may notice is vaginal dryness. Vaginal moisturisers or lubricants such as KY gel can be helpful. You can get vaginal moisturisers on prescription from your GP. You can buy KY gel in most chemists.

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**ARIMIDEX**



For further information see our factsheets on

**Understanding and Managing Menopausal Symptoms and Complementary Therapies.**

**Less common side effects**

You may have other less common side effects such as headache, weakness, joint pain or stiffness, a skin rash or sleepiness. These are usually temporary and should wear off after a short time. Let your specialist know if you do experience any of these side effects.

You may find that your hair gets thinner while you are taking Arimidex. When you stop taking it your hair will usually be the same as it was before.

**Rare side effects**

Vaginal bleeding is a rare side effect of Arimidex. This can happen in the first few weeks after starting the treatment. It usually occurs when someone has changed from one hormone tablet to another. If bleeding continues, you need to tell your cancer specialist. Do not stop taking your Arimidex without consulting your specialist.

**CAN I TAKE ARIMIDEX WITH MY OTHER DRUGS?**

Drugs containing oestrogen, such as the contraceptive pill or HRT, should not be taken while you are taking Arimidex because they stop it working effectively. There do not seem to be any other prescribed drugs that interfere with Arimidex, and other prescribed medicines are not affected if you are taking Arimidex.

**FURTHER SUPPORT**

If you have any concerns about taking Arimidex you can talk to your specialist or breast care nurse. You might find it easier to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience to you.

Reach to Recovery is a programme set up to help and support women who have recently had a breast cancer diagnosis. The programme works on the principle of personal contact between the patient and a Reach to Recovery volunteer – a woman who has had treatment for breast cancer. Carefully selected and fully trained volunteers are available to provide advice and reassurance at a time when a woman is most in need of both. For more information on individual support or support groups in your area, call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 30 90 40.

**HELP FROM ACTION BREAST CANCER**

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, provides breast cancer information and support, and funds breast cancer research. Our services are free, confidential and accessible.

For more information call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on Freefone 1800 30 90 40 or visit [www.irishcancer.ie/action](http://www.irishcancer.ie/action)

information on **drug therapy****ARIMIDEX****OTHER ORGANISATIONS****Irish Cancer Society**

43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4.  
Helpline Freephone:  
1800 200 700  
Email: [helpline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:helpline@irishcancer.ie)  
Web: [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

**Reach to Recovery**

43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4.  
Helpline Freephone:  
1800 30 90 40

**VHI Healthcare**

*(All correspondence should be sent to  
the postal address in Kilkenny)*  
IDA Business Park, Dublin  
Road, Kilkenny  
**Callsave: 1850 44 44 44**  
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Saturday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Website: [www.vhi.ie](http://www.vhi.ie)

**Quinn Healthcare**

Mill House, Fermoy, Co. Cork.  
**LoCall: 1890 89 1890**  
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Saturday 10 a.m. to 3.30 p.m.  
Web: [www.quinn-healthcare.com](http://www.quinn-healthcare.com)

**Hibernian Aviva Health**

*Postal Address*  
PO Box 764, Togher, Co. Cork  
*Head Office*  
One Park Place, Hatch Street,  
Dublin 2  
**CallSave: 1850 717 717**  
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
Website: [www.hibernian.ie](http://www.hibernian.ie)

**Action Breast Cancer**

43 -45 Northumberland Road  
Ballsbridge  
Dublin 4  
Freefone: 1800 30 90 40  
E-mail [ABC@irishcancer.ie](mailto:ABC@irishcancer.ie)  
Web: [www.cancer.ie/action](http://www.cancer.ie/action)

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

**Irish Cancer Society**  
[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

**Breast Cancer Care UK**  
[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

**American Cancer Society**  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**The Susan G. Komen  
Foundation**  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

**Europa Donna**  
[www.cancereurope.org/  
europadonna](http://www.cancereurope.org/europadonna)

**ABC -  
ACTION BREAST CANCER**

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, is the leading provider of breast cancer information and support in Ireland. Each year we reach over 25,000 women who are concerned about breast cancer or breast health. Our services are free and include:

- National Breast Cancer Helpline 1800 30 90 40 - staffed by specialist cancer nurses
- Patient care programmes - providing emotional support and practical assistance for those living with breast cancer
- Health promotion - providing community and workplace programmes on breast awareness and leading a healthy lifestyle
- Advocacy - providing a voice for those affected by breast cancer in Ireland
- Professional support - complementing the services offered by those caring for breast cancer patients
- Research - funding vital Irish research that will have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

ABC is funded entirely by donations from the public. If you would like to support our work or make a donation please contact us.

action  
breast  
cancer

a programme of  
irish cancer society

**Freefone Helpline**  
**1800 30 90 40**

Published by the Irish Cancer Society © 2007  
Updated June 2009 Review Date 2011  
ICAN58657

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