



FACTSHEET

a programme of
 irish cancer society

information on **drug therapy**

Taxotere (docetaxel)

This factsheet explains briefly what Taxotere is, when it may be prescribed, how it works, what the benefits are and what side effects may occur. Taxotere is the brand name of the drug that is used throughout this factsheet. Most people know it by this name, although its generic (general) name is docetaxel. You may find it useful to read this with our booklet on **Chemotherapy**.

WHAT IS TAXOTERE?

Taxotere is a chemotherapy drug that belongs to a group of drugs called taxanes.

WHO MIGHT BE OFFERED TAXOTERE?

Taxotere is used to treat primary breast cancer (cancer that started in the breast and has not moved to any other part of the body) in combination with other Chemotherapy drugs. Taxotere is also used to treat

locally advanced breast cancer (cancer that is widespread in the breast area) or secondary breast cancer (cancer that has spread to other parts of the body).

You may be offered Taxotere when other Chemotherapy drugs have already been used, or if other drugs are not appropriate.

HOW DOES TAXOTERE WORK?

When normal cells start dividing, structures called microtubules are formed. Once the cells stop dividing these microtubules are broken down or destroyed.

However, with cancer cells Taxotere stops the microtubules from breaking down. The cells become blocked by microtubules so that they can't grow and divide, and they eventually die.

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HOW IS IT GIVEN?

Taxotere is given into a vein in the hand or arm in a drip and you will usually have four to six treatments as an outpatient.

Taxotere is normally given every three weeks over a one-hour period. It may also be given weekly.

Taxotere can be given with other types of chemotherapy.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF TAXOTERE?

Like any drug, Taxotere can cause side effects. However, everyone reacts differently to drugs and some people have more side effects than others. The side effects of Taxotere can usually be controlled. If you are concerned about any side effects, talk to your chemotherapy nurse or cancer specialist (oncologist).

If you are being given other chemotherapy or anti-cancer drugs with Taxotere you may have additional side effects.

Hair loss (alopecia)

Most people will lose all their hair, including eyebrows, eyelashes and body hair, which can be a shock. You may begin to lose your hair about two weeks after the first treatment. Hair loss is usually gradual but it can happen very quickly, sometimes over a couple of days. The hair loss is temporary and your hair will begin to grow back about a month after your treatment has ended. You may like to look into suitable hairpieces before you lose your hair. There is less hair loss when Taxotere is given weekly.

Effects on the blood

Taxotere can have a temporary effect on bone marrow, which is where blood cells are made. This can result in a low white cell count (increased risk of infection), a low platelet count (risk of bruising or bleeding) and occasionally a low red cell count (anaemia). The blood count will normally fall about five to ten days after you start your treatment. If it drops below a certain level your next treatment may be delayed until your white cell count is within safe levels. You will have regular blood tests throughout your treatment. If you feel unwell and/or have a raised temperature following treatment, contact the hospital without delay.

Fluid retention and weight gain

You may develop oedema (a build-up of fluid in the body). This can result in swollen ankles and legs. You may also put on weight, but you will usually lose it again once the treatment has finished. The drugs that you are given to prevent any allergic reaction will help reduce the risk of fluid building up.

Numbness and/or tingling in hands or feet

A few people receiving Taxotere experience numbness or tingling in their hands and feet. This is due to the effect of Taxotere on the nerves and is known as peripheral neuropathy. It can vary from mild to severe. If it is severe, then it may be necessary either to reduce the

dose of the drug or to stop it completely. This side effect normally wears off within about three months. Some patients require medication to help reduce the sensations experienced.

Taste Changes

During Chemotherapy, you may find that your sense of taste can change and some food may taste bland and different. You might also find that you no longer like the taste of some foods you used to enjoy.

Nausea

You may experience nausea although it is usually mild. You may start to feel sick a few hours after your treatment but you will usually be given medication to stop this happening. If this medication does not work, tell your nurse or doctor and they can prescribe a different medication for you.

Diarrhoea

You may have some diarrhoea but your specialist or GP can prescribe medication to help control it. If it continues, contact your oncology nurse or doctor.

Sore mouth

You may find that your mouth is sore and small ulcers develop. Your specialist or chemotherapy nurse will advise you on suitable mouthwashes. Take care when brushing your teeth and use a soft toothbrush.



Allergic reaction

If you have an allergic reaction to Taxotere it will probably happen within the first few minutes of your treatment. You will be given a combination of drugs to reduce the risk of an allergic reaction. You will be monitored closely during your treatment so that any reaction can be dealt with immediately.

Reactions can vary from mild to severe. Symptoms include flushing, skin rash, itching, back pain, shortness of breath, faintness, fever or chills. If you have a severe reaction, treatment will be stopped immediately and you may not be given Taxotere again.

Painful muscles and joints

The muscles or joints may ache or become painful two to three days after you have your treatment. This usually wears off after a few days, although occasionally it can be severe and you may need to take painkillers.

Tiredness or fatigue

You may become very tired after your treatment and this feeling can last for about a week. If you feel like this, it is important to get plenty of rest. For our booklet **Coping with Fatigue** call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone on 1800 30 90 40.

Effects on fertility

It is not known exactly what effect Taxotere may have on your fertility. Taxotere may interfere with your normal menstrual cycle (periods). Some

women's periods may stop, this may be temporary and it is important to use a barrier method of contraception, to prevent pregnancy while on Taxotere.

Skin reactions

You may develop a skin rash anywhere on your body, although it is most common on the hands and feet. Your skin may become red, dry and flaky. The symptoms can be improved by using a glycerine-based hand cream.

Nail reactions

The colour of your nails may change after several treatments with Taxotere but it will normally grow out over several months.

Changes in heart rate

On rare occasions Taxotere can slow the heart rate, so you will be carefully monitored for this during your treatment. If it happens it can be treated easily and does not mean you will have to stop your treatment. This is not the same as having an allergic reaction to Taxotere (see above).

Pain in the injection site

In a few cases mild pain can occur where the needle has been inserted or anywhere along the vein. If you are in pain tell your chemotherapy nurse immediately. After a few weeks you may notice tenderness, darkening and hardening near where the needle was inserted. This should fade in time.

Travel and vaccinations

If you are planning to travel abroad and require vaccination, it is important to consider your vaccination schedule and timing of this. Some vaccines are less effective if given during treatment and some live vaccines can cause serious infections so should not be given. Live vaccines include those that protect against measles, yellow fever, rubella and typhoid.

If you are planning, this type of trip, please notify your oncologist, who can advise you on a safe time frame. Some specialists advise not to have live vaccines for six months after chemotherapy or until your immune system has recovered.

Effects on the liver

On very rare occasions, Taxotere may affect how well your liver works. This is temporary and will return to normal when the treatment has stopped. You will have regular blood tests to monitor this throughout your treatment.

FURTHER SUPPORT

If you have any concerns about taking Taxotere you can talk to your specialist, chemotherapy nurse 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 breast surgery. 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 Freefone 1800 30 90 40 or visit www.irishcancer.ie/action

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Action Breast Cancer
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Freefone Helpline: 1800 30 90 40
Email: abc@irishcancer.ie

Irish Cancer Society
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Freefone Helpline: 1800 200 700
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie

Reach to Recovery
43/45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4
Freefone Helpline: 1800 30 90 40

VHI Healthcare
IDA Business Park
Dublin Road
Kilkenny
Callsave: 1850 44 44 44
Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm,
Saturday 9am to 3pm
Website: www.vhi.ie

QUINN-healthcare
Mill Island, Fermoy, Co. Cork,
Lo Call: 1890 89 1890
Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm,
Saturday 10am to 3.30pm
Website:
www.quinn-healthcare.com

Hibernian Aviva Health
Postal Address:
PO Box 764, Togher, Co. Cork
Head Office:
Hibernian Aviva Health
One Park Place, Hatch Street
Dublin 2
CallSave: 1850 717 717
Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm
Website: www.hibernian.ie

USEFUL WEBSITES

Irish Cancer Society
www.cancer.ie
Breast Cancer Care UK
www.breastcancercare.org.uk
American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
The Susan G. Komen Foundation
www.komen.org
Europa Donna
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

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