

# Zoladex (goserelin)

This factsheet explains briefly what Zoladex is, when it may be prescribed, how it works, what the benefits are and what side effects may occur. Zoladex 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 goserelin.

## WHAT IS ZOLADEX?

Zoladex is a drug used to treat breast cancer. It is a man-made version of a natural hormone that controls how the ovaries work.

## WHO MIGHT BE OFFERED ZOLADEX?

Zoladex is used to treat early breast cancer in premenopausal women (Women who are still having their monthly period).

It is given in addition to surgery and other treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy. It is suitable for women who have oestrogen receptor-positive tumours (breast cancers that are sensitive to oestrogen). There is a test to check if the breast cancer cells have oestrogen receptors. This will help to find out which women are likely to benefit from Zoladex.

Zoladex may also be used to treat pre-menopausal women with secondary breast cancer

(breast cancer that has spread to another part of the body). In this case it may be prescribed either alone or together with other types of treatments.

As part of a clinical trial looking at chemotherapy and fertility, Zoladex may also be given to pre-menopausal women who have oestrogen receptor negative tumours.



## HOW DOES IT WORK?

Zoladex works by 'switching off' the production of the hormone oestrogen from the ovaries. It does this by interfering with other hormones coming from the brain that controls how the ovaries work. Within three weeks of starting the treatment, your oestrogen level will be lowered to a level similar to that of women after the menopause and this will carry on for as long as you are taking Zoladex.

For more information about stopping the ovaries working, see Action Breast Cancer's factsheet on Ovarian Ablation.

## HOW IS ZOLADEX GIVEN?

Zoladex is given as a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection into the abdomen (tummy) every 28 days.

A local anaesthetic may be used but because the needle is specially designed to reduce discomfort this is not normally necessary. You will usually be given your first injection as an outpatient at the hospital. After this your GP, community or practice nurse can give the injections either in your home or at the surgery.

## HOW LONG WILL I BE ON ZOLADEX?

Zoladex is usually given for between two and five years. If you have secondary breast cancer, you will be given Zoladex for as long as it keeps the cancer under control.

## WILL ZOLADEX MAKE MY PERIODS STOP?

Your periods are likely to stop after the first or second injection of Zoladex. Most women will start their periods again within six months of their last Zoladex injection. In some cases, women may start to go through their natural menopause during treatment and will not have any periods afterwards.

## DO I NEED TO USE CONTRACEPTION WHILE I'M TAKING ZOLADEX?

Zoladex is not a contraceptive and the risk of pregnancy is particularly high during initial treatment. If you are sexually active you should use non hormonal methods of contraception (condoms, IUDs, diaphragms and femidoms) as long as you are taking Zoladex. As with any drug, it is important not to get pregnant while you are taking Zoladex because of the risk to the pregnancy and the baby.

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE AFFECTS OF ZOLADEX TREATMENT?

Everyone reacts differently to drugs and some women will have more side effects than others.

The main side effects are menopausal symptoms including hot flushes, sweats and a loss of libido (sex drive). For more information see Action Breasts Cancer's factsheet on Understanding and Managing Menopausal Symptoms.

Headaches, mood changes, depression, vaginal dryness and changes in breast size may also occur. During the first month of treatment there may be vaginal bleeding because of the withdrawal of the hormone oestrogen. Occasionally there may be joint pain and stiffness, mild skin rashes and local reactions such as bruising at the injection site.

In very rare cases, high or low blood pressure may be noticed. This does not normally need treatment, but sometimes Zoladex has to be stopped.

Other side effects are, blood clots, which could cause pain in the chest, groin or legs. If this occurs contact your doctor immediately.

Lack of oestrogen over a long period can cause osteoporosis (thinning of the bone). If you have concerns about this, you may find it helpful to have further discussion with your specialist team.



If you are given Zoladex to treat secondary bone cancer you may have more pain for a short time, and in rare cases the level of calcium in the blood may increase. This can be monitored by checking your blood levels. If you have persistent troublesome side effects from taking Zoladex, tell your specialist team so that they can decide how best to deal with them.

### **WHAT SHALL I DO IF I HAVE ANY CONCERNS?**

If you are troubled by side effects, you may find it more difficult to cope with your everyday work, home and family routines. If you have any problems while you are taking Zoladex, it is important to discuss your concerns with 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. 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.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



## OTHER ORGANISATIONS

### Action Breast Cancer

43/45 Northumberland Road  
Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.

**Freefone: 1800 30 90 40**

Email: [abc@irishcancer.ie](mailto:abc@irishcancer.ie)

Web: [www.cancer.ie/action](http://www.cancer.ie/action)

### Irish Cancer Society

43/45 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4.

**Freefone Helpline:**

**1 800 200 700**

Email: [helpline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:helpline@irishcancer.ie)

### 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)

## 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)

### Cancerbackup

[www.cancerbackup.org](http://www.cancerbackup.org)

### The Susan G. Komen Foundation

[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

### Europa Donna

[www.europadonnaireland.com](http://www.europadonnaireland.com)

### Manual Lymph Drainage Ireland

[www.mldireland.com](http://www.mldireland.com)

### Lymphoedema Ireland

[www.lymphireland.ie](http://www.lymphireland.ie)

## 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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