

# Tamoxifen

**Names** The generic drug name is tamoxifen (ta-MOX-i-fen). Nolvadex® is a brand name. (There may be other names for this medication).

**How is it Administered?** Tamoxifen is taken orally, as a tablet.

**What is it Used For?** It is used to treat breast cancer. It may be given after surgery to reduce the risk of getting cancer in the other breast. (It has greater benefit to those who have ESR+ or PSR+ breast cancers.) It may be used to treat breast cancer that has spread; to reduce the risk of DCIS from becoming invasive breast cancer; and for women at high risk of developing breast cancer. It may also be used to treat ovarian cancer.

**How Does it Work?** Your body makes hormones to carry messages to certain “target” organs and tissues. Hormones are made in one gland, and then travel through the blood to their target organ(s).

The main female hormone is estrogen. There are many cells in your body that have estrogen receptors on them. Estrogen attaches to these receptors, and then those cells will act in a particular way. Estrogen has been shown to cause the growth or spread of some types of cancers.

**What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Tamoxifen?**

Tell your doctor if you:

- gave had an allergic reaction to tamoxifen
- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have blood pressure, diabetes, limited mobility, cataracts or other eye problems, high cholesterol, problems with your blood, or if you take anticoagulant medications (“blood thinners”)
- have or have ever had blood clots, pulmonary emboli, uterine cancer, and/or a stroke

**This medication may interact with other medications or cause harmful side effects. Tell your doctor about any prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you are taking.**

### What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Menopause-like symptoms: hot flashes (feeling of warmth redness of the face, neck, arms and occasionally upper chest), night sweats, and/or menstrual changes or changes in vaginal discharge
- Nausea, weight gain or loss
- Swelling in hands, feet, and ankles
- Loss of sexual desire (decreased libido), impaired or lost sexual function (in men)
- Anxiety (nervousness), depression, and/or moodiness
- Pain or reddening around the tumor site; increased bone or tumor pain
- Excessive fatigue and/or dizziness
- Thinning hair
- Headache

### How Can I Manage These Side Effects?

- Ask your doctor about medication to help prevent or lessen nausea, headache, and pain, and/or to manage menopausal symptoms.
- If you develop a rash, do not put anything on it unless your first ask your doctor or nurse. Keep the area clean and dry.
- To avoid dehydration, drink at least two to three quarts of fluid every 24 hours, unless you are instructed otherwise.
- Dress in layers if you are experiencing any sort of body temperature changes such as sweats or hot flashes.
- If mood changes are interfering with your ability to function, please talk to your doctor or nurse.
- If you are having problems with fatigue, try to space your activities during the day and allow for rest/nap time. Ask for help with chores and delegate responsibilities to family members or friends when possible.

### When Should I Call the Doctor?

#### **Call your doctor immediately if you have:**

- any sign of infection: **fever of 100.4°F (38°C)** or higher, chills, cough, sore throat, pain or burning upon urination; redness or tenderness along a vein, at an IV site, or at any other wound or skin irritation
- any sign of an allergic reaction: itching, hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing, dizziness, or palpitations

When Should I  
Call the Doctor?  
(cont.)

- unusual bruising or bleeding: bleeding lasts more than 10-15 minutes or that causes dizziness; black or bloody stools; vomit that is bloody or that looks like coffee grounds; blood in your urine or phlegm /mucus, unusually heavy menstrual bleeding, spontaneous bleeding from your gums or nose, or superficial bleeding into the skin that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae)
- any signs of a blood clot: swelling or tenderness in your legs; chest pain; difficulty breathing; coughing up blood; sudden weakness, tingling, or numbness in your face, arm, or leg – especially on only one side; sudden confusion, difficulty speaking or understanding; sudden difficulty seeing in one or both eyes or walking; dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; or severe, sudden headache
- changes in vaginal discharge, especially if the discharge becomes bloody, brown, or rusty; pain or pressure in the pelvis (the stomach area below the belly button);
- any signs of hypercalcemia (too much calcium in the blood): nausea, vomiting, and unusual thirst.
- new breast lumps

What Else Do I  
Need to Know  
About  
Tamoxifen?

- Some women taking tamoxifen for advanced breast cancer may experience a “tumor flare”, which may cause hypercalcemia (high levels of calcium in your blood). You may require a few days in the hospital to normalize your calcium level.
- Keep all your appointments with your doctor and the lab.
- Both men and women should use a barrier-type of contraception during treatment and for two months afterwards. Tamoxifen may harm a fetus.
- Women will need a gynecologic check-up before therapy begins and at regular intervals during therapy.
- Use this medicine only as directed by your doctor. Do not use more or less of it, and do not use it more often than your doctor ordered.
- Do not stop it without first checking with your doctor.
- Swallow the tablets whole with a drink of water with or without food.
- If you miss a dose of this medicine. Go back to your regular schedule.
- If you would like more information on tamoxifen, talk to your doctor.