

## BREAST CANCER HORMONE THERAPY

Poonam (name changed) a 45 year old lady underwent Mastectomy for left breast cancer and subsequently completed her chemotherapy treatment. She has now been advised by her Specialist to have Hormone therapy.

### What is the relevance of Hormone receptor tests in Breast cancer?

Some breast cancers are stimulated to grow by hormones oestrogen & Progesterone. A test to discover whether breast cancer cells are sensitive to these hormones (hormone positive) should be routinely carried out after surgery. This test is known as Hormone receptor Test.

A positive Hormone receptor test means that breast cancer is sensitive to either oestrogen (oestrogen receptor positive or ER +ve) or progesterone (Progesterone receptor positive or PR + ve) or both. If breast cancer is hormone receptor positive, it may respond to hormone therapy.

A negative Hormone receptor test where cancer is Oestrogen receptor negative (ER – ve) and progesterone receptor negative (PR – ve) means that breast cancer is unlikely to respond to Hormone therapy and so there would be no benefit in taking hormonal drugs.

### What is Hormone therapy?

As some breast cancer cells are stimulated to grow by the Hormones oestrogen and progesterone, a test to discover whether breast cancer cells are sensitive to these Hormones is routinely carried out after Surgery. This is known as Hormone Receptor Test. If the result is positive, then it means that Hormone therapy is suitable and would be potentially beneficial to the patient.

Hormone therapy, also known as Endocrine therapy, treats the whole body and prevents Hormones oestrogen and progesterone from stimulating the growth of breast cancer cells

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### Why is Hormone therapy used?

If a patient has a Hormone sensitive breast cancer, then she is offered Hormone therapy as part of her treatment to help prevent breast cancer coming back

### **When is Hormone therapy used?**

Hormone therapy usually starts after Surgery, but if Chemotherapy is part of the treatment schedule, then it is started after completion of Chemotherapy. Some people are given Hormone therapy before Surgery to try and shrink large tumours. This is known as Neo Adjuvant treatment.

### **Why is Hormone therapy not given along with Chemotherapy?**

There is evidence to suggest that the effect and impact of Chemotherapy can be impaired by administering Chemotherapy and Hormone therapy together. Therefore, Hormone therapy is given only after completion of Chemotherapy

### **What are the drugs used in Hormone therapy?**

There are several different types of Hormone therapy drugs and the Specialist will consider the most suitable treatment for a particular individual. Generally, they are given for some years to prevent the chances of breast cancer returning. The drugs commonly used are Tamoxifen, Zoladex, Anastrozole, Letrozole and Examestane. The appropriate drug is decided by the Specialist in consultation with the patient

### **What are the side effects of Hormone therapy?**

The common side effects include hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings. Some people experience weight gain and joint pains. If the side effects are severe, then the Specialist may consider switching from one Hormone therapy drug to another.