



**BC Cancer Agency**

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

## For the Patient: Tamoxifen

Other names: APO-TAMOX®, GEN-TAMOXIFEN®,  
NOLVADEX-D®, NOVO-TAMOXIFEN®,  
TAMOFEN®

- **Tamoxifen** (ta-MOX-i-fen) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancers. Some cancers are hormone sensitive (estrogen or progesterone receptor positive) and their growth can be affected by blocking the effect of the hormone estrogen. Tamoxifen blocks the effect of estrogen produced by your body and decreases the growth of hormone sensitive tumours. Tamoxifen may also have anti-cancer effects not related to the hormone estrogen. It is a tablet that you take by mouth.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to tamoxifen before taking tamoxifen.
- It is important to **take** tamoxifen exactly as directed by your doctor. Tamoxifen may be taken with food or on an empty stomach with a glass of water or juice. Tamoxifen may be taken at **any** time of the day but should be taken at the same time each day.
- For once a day dosing: If you **miss a dose** of tamoxifen, take it as soon as you can if it is within 12 hours of the missed dose. If it is over 12 hours since your missed dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your usual dosing times.
- For twice a day dosing: Take your tamoxifen at **evenly spaced times** during the day. If you miss a dose of tamoxifen, take it as soon as you can. Take the rest of the day's dose at your usual time. If you remember at the time for the next dose, take both doses and return to your usual dosing times.
- Other drugs such as warfarin (COUMADIN®) and rifampin (RIFADIN®, ROFACT®), and some antidepressants such as paroxetine (PAXIL®) may **interact** with tamoxifen. Tell your doctor if you are taking these or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your doses may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- Because tamoxifen works by blocking the effects of estrogen in your body, it is recommended that you avoid using estrogen replacement therapy such as conjugated estrogens (PREMARIN®, C.E.S.®, ESTRACE®, ESTRACOMB®, ESTRADERM® or, ESTRING®) or birth control pills. However, ESTRING® may be used in some cases to treat vaginal dryness as directed by your doctor.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of tamoxifen.
- Tamoxifen may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. At higher doses, tamoxifen is used as a fertility treatment. It is best to **use a method of birth control** while

being treated with tamoxifen if you are able to become pregnant. **Do not use birth control pills.** Tell your doctor right away if you become pregnant. **Do not breast feed** during treatment.

- Tamoxifen will **not induce menopause** unless you are approaching the age of your natural menopause. It may cause your period to become irregular.
- **Tell** doctors or dentists that you are being treated with tamoxifen before you receive any treatment from them. If you are planning to have major surgery (e.g., joint replacement) you should stop taking tamoxifen 2-3 weeks prior to surgery and only restart it once you are back to normal activity, about 3 weeks after surgery. This helps to lower the risk of having a blood clot develop after surgery.
- **Store** tamoxifen tablets out of the reach of children, at room temperature, away from heat, light, and moisture.
- Tamoxifen is **usually well tolerated** and serious side effects are rare.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p><b>Hot flashes</b> (sudden sweating and feelings of warmth) may commonly occur when you first start taking tamoxifen. This usually improves as your body adjusts to tamoxifen.</p>	<p>If hot flashes are troublesome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your tamoxifen at bedtime.</li> <li>• If night sweats interfere with sleep, try taking tamoxifen in the morning.</li> <li>• Some people find it helpful to avoid alcohol, spicy food, caffeine intake (coffee, tea, colas, chocolate).</li> <li>• Follow a regular exercise program.</li> <li>• Try staying in a cool environment.</li> <li>• Wear layers so that if you do experience a hot flash, the outer layers may be removed.</li> <li>• Talk to your doctor if your hot flashes continue to bother you. There may be medications available to lessen them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vaginal discharge or dryness</b> may rarely occur.</p>	<p>If vaginal dryness is bothersome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try a water based lubricants, such as REPLENS®.</li> <li>• Ask your doctor for more advice if vaginal dryness continues to bother you.</li> </ul> <p>If vaginal discharge is bothersome make sure to mention it at your next visit.</p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Nausea</b> (upset stomach) may sometimes occur <b>when you first start</b> taking tamoxifen. This should improve as your body adjusts to the tamoxifen. Most people have little or no nausea.	If nausea is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your tamoxifen after eating.</li> <li>• Try the ideas in <a href="#">Food Choices to Help Control Nausea</a>.*</li> </ul>
<b>Headache</b> may sometimes occur.	Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day.
<b>Muscle or joint pain</b> may sometimes occur.	You may take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) for mild to moderate pain. Tell your doctor if the pain interferes with your activity.
<b>Skin rashes</b> may rarely occur.	If the rash is bothersome: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your doctor during office hours.</li> <li>• Otherwise make sure to mention it at your next visit.</li> </ul>
<b>Tiredness</b> and lack of energy may sometimes occur.	This is usually mild. If it persists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try the ideas in <a href="#">Your Bank of Energy Savings: Helping People with Cancer Handle Fatigue</a>.*</li> </ul>
<b>Swelling</b> of hands, feet, or lower legs may rarely occur if your body retains extra fluid.	This is usually mild. If swelling is a problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your feet when sitting.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> </ul>
<b>High blood pressure</b> may rarely occur with long-term use.	Check your blood pressure regularly.
<b>Blood clots</b> may rarely occur, usually in the leg. This is more likely to happen if you have had blood clots before. Signs to watch for include tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath.	Tell your doctor if you have ever had treatment for a blood clot. To help prevent blood clots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep active.</li> <li>• Drink plenty of fluids.</li> <li>• Avoid tight clothing.</li> <li>• Do not sit with your legs crossed at the knees for long periods of time.</li> </ul>
<b>Weight changes</b> may sometimes occur. A small amount of weight gain or loss may occur.	To maintain your weight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep active.</li> <li>• Modify your diet as necessary.</li> </ul>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<b>Hair thinning</b> may rarely occur. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with tamoxifen. Colour and texture may change.	To minimize thinning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush.</li> <li>• Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes, and perms.</li> </ul>
<b>Changes in cholesterol or triglycerides</b> may rarely occur.	Discuss this with your doctor if you have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A history of heart disease. High blood pressure.</li> <li>• Elevated triglycerides.</li> <li>• You may need to have your cholesterol and triglycerides levels checked a few months after starting tamoxifen.</li> </ul>
<b>Endometrial cancer:</b> cancer of the lining of the uterus (womb) may rarely occur with prolonged use of tamoxifen.	Tell your doctor if you have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• any unexpected bleeding from the vagina, persistent abdominal pain and/or pressure or discomfort in the pelvis.</li> </ul> <p>There is no risk of this cancer to women who have had a hysterectomy (uterus removed).</p>
<b>Cataracts</b> may rarely occur.	See an eye doctor if your vision becomes cloudy or blurred.
<b>Depression</b> may rarely occur.	If you become unusually sad, or tearful, and lose interest in the usual things that give you pleasure, speak to your doctor.

**\*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse or pharmacist for a copy.**

**STOP TAKING TAMOXIFEN AND SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of a **stroke** such as sudden onset of severe headache, eyesight changes, slurred speech, loss of coordination, weakness or numbness in arm or leg.
- Signs of a **blood clot** such as tenderness or hardness over a vein, calf swelling and tenderness, sudden onset of cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- Signs of an **allergic reaction** including dizziness, fast heart beat, face and tongue swelling, and breathing problems with or without a rash.

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:**

- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- If you have bone metastases, report unusual **thirst** if it occurs in the first 4 weeks of treatment.
- Unexpected **bleeding** from the vagina, persistent **abdominal pain** and/or **pressure** or **discomfort** in the pelvis.
- Signs of **liver problems** such as yellow eyes or skin, white or clay-coloured stools.

