



Goserelin (Zoladex®)

This factsheet is about a drug used to treat breast cancer called goserelin, which is also called Zoladex®. It explains what goserelin is, how it works, when it might be prescribed, what the benefits are, and what side-effects may occur. For more information, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

What is goserelin?

Goserelin is a drug used to treat breast cancer. It is a manmade version of a natural hormone that controls how your ovaries work.

How does goserelin work?

Goserelin works by 'switching off' the production of the hormone oestrogen from your ovaries. It does this by interfering with other hormones coming from your brain that control how your ovaries work. Within 3 weeks of starting the treatment, your oestrogen level will be at the same level as that of a woman after the menopause. This will carry on for as long as you are taking goserelin.

Who might be offered goserelin?

Early breast cancer

Goserelin is used to treat early breast cancer in premenopausal women (still having their periods). It is given along with 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). This means the cancer cells are encouraged to grow by oestrogen.

Samples from your breast cancer are tested to see if you have oestrogen receptors. This will help to find out if you are likely to benefit from goserelin.

Secondary breast cancer

Goserelin may also be used to treat premenopausal women with secondary breast cancer. This is breast cancer that has spread to another part of your body. In this case, it may be prescribed either on its own or together with other types of treatments.



How is goserelin given?

Goserelin is given as an injection under the skin in your tummy (abdomen) every 28 days. It is called a depot injection, which means that the drug is absorbed slowly into your body over 28 days.

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 goserelin?

Goserelin is usually given for between 2 and 5 years. If you have secondary breast cancer, you will be given goserelin for as long as it keeps the cancer under control.

Will goserelin make my periods stop?

Your periods are likely to stop after the first or second injection of goserelin. Most women will start their periods again within 6 months of their last goserelin 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 taking goserelin?

Goserelin is not a contraceptive and the risk of pregnancy is particularly high during the first treatment. If you are sexually active, you should use a non-hormonal type of contraception as long as you are taking goserelin. For example, a condom, IUD, diaphragm or femidom. As with any drug, it is important not to get pregnant while you are taking goserelin because of the risk to the pregnancy and the baby.

What happens if I miss an injection?

If you miss an injection, try to have it as soon as possible. As each injection lasts 4 weeks, it is better to have one during the week it is due.

What are the side-effects of goserelin?

Everyone reacts differently to drugs and some women will have more side-effects than others. As goserelin is commonly given with other drugs, it can be hard to know which side-effects are caused by which treatment. The main side-effects of goserelin are menopausal symptoms.

Common side-effects:

- **Menopausal symptoms:** These symptoms include hot flushes, sweats and a loss of libido (sex drive). Headaches, mood changes, depression, vaginal dryness and changes in breast size may also occur. For more information, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700 and ask for a factsheet on *Understanding and Managing Menopausal Symptoms*.
- **Vaginal bleeding:** During the first month of treatment there may be bleeding from your vagina. This is due to the withdrawal of the hormone oestrogen.
- **Joint pain and skin rashes:** Occasionally there may be joint pain and stiffness, mild skin rashes and local reactions such as bruising at the injection site.
- **Osteoporosis:** Lack of oestrogen over a long period can cause osteoporosis (thinning of your bones). When your bones are less dense they can break more easily. You may be offered a DEXA scan to check your bone density before you start treatment. Once the results of your scan are available, you will be told how to look after your bone health. If you have concerns, do discuss them with your specialist team.

- **High or low blood pressure:** This may occur in very rare cases. Normally it does not need treatment, but sometimes goserelin has to be stopped.
- **Bone pain and hypercalcaemia:** If you are given goserelin to treat secondary bone cancer, you may have more pain for a short time. In very rare cases the level of calcium in your blood may increase (hypercalcaemia). This can be kept under control by checking your blood levels.

If you have ongoing troublesome side-effects from taking goserelin, do tell your doctor or nurse. They can decide how best to deal with them.

Further support

If you have any concerns about taking goserelin, talk to your chemotherapy nurse or breast care nurse. You might also find it easier to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience to you. For example, Reach to Recovery is a programme set up to help and support women who have had a recent breast cancer diagnosis.

The programme involves personal contact between you and a Reach to Recovery volunteer. This is 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 you need them most.

For more information on individual support or support groups in your area, call the National Cancer Helpline on 1800 200 700.

You might find it easier to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience to you. For example, Reach to Recovery is a programme set up to help and support women who have had a recent breast cancer diagnosis.

CANCER INFORMATION FACTSHEET

Useful organisations

Reach to Recovery

Provides practical and emotional support to women with breast cancer.

43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

Irish Osteoporosis Society

Website: www.osteoporosis.ie



**Irish
Cancer
Society**

**Action
Breast
Cancer**



FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on goserelin or for confidential advice from our cancer nurse specialists, call the **National Cancer Helpline** on freefone

1800 200 700

(Monday–Thursday, 9am–7pm; Friday, 9am–5pm) or email helpline@irishcancer.ie

Irish Cancer Society

43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
Tel: (01) 231 0500
Fax: (01) 231 0555
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Website: www.cancer.ie

Published by the Irish Cancer Society.

© Irish Cancer Society, 2007, revised 2013

Next revision: 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Irish Cancer Society.



Freefone National Cancer Helpline 1800 200 700