MEDICINE INFORMATION

Palbociclib and fulvestrant

A guide to using the two medicines together for some advanced breast cancers, including the pill calendar, injection visits, blood tests and what to do if you miss a dose.

At a glance

Treatment	Palbociclib + Fulvestrant
When it may be used	For selected people with hormone receptor-positive, HER2-negative breast cancer that is advanced or has spread, usually after prior hormone treatment.
How it is given	You take palbociclib by mouth. Fulvestrant is given as injections into the muscles of the buttocks.
Before you start	Ask for a written calendar for both medicines, when to have blood tests and who to call for fever or a missed dose.

What this treatment is and how it works

Palbociclib is a targeted medicine. It blocks proteins called cyclin-dependent kinases 4 and 6 (CDK4 and CDK6) that help some cancer cells divide. Fulvestrant is a hormone treatment that blocks and reduces the number of oestrogen receptors. These receptors are proteins that can carry a signal telling some breast cancer cells to grow.

When it may be used

The combination can be used for some people with hormone receptor-positive breast cancer that is locally advanced or has spread. Hormone receptor-positive means the cancer has proteins that respond to hormones. A test for human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2) helps confirm whether the cancer is HER2-negative. Your team considers those results and earlier hormone treatments when choosing a plan.

If you have not been through menopause, you may also need medicine that stops the ovaries making oestrogen. Ask whether this applies to you and when to attend for any additional injections.

Before treatment

Tell your team about liver problems, an infection, a history of blood clots or a bleeding problem. Mention any blood thinners and all supplements and prescriptions. The team checks blood counts and usually tests liver function. Ask what number to call if you feel unwell and where to have your blood tests before starting the next supply of palbociclib.

How treatment is given

A common palbociclib schedule is one dose each day for three weeks, followed by one week off. Use the dates written for you, as the team may adjust the schedule. Swallow the medicine whole. Check the instructions on your pack, since capsules are taken with food and tablets can generally be taken with or without food. If you miss a dose or vomit after taking it, follow the leaflet and take the next dose at the usual time. Ask the team if you are unsure.

Fulvestrant is given into the muscles of the buttocks, usually as two injections, one on each side. There is often an extra visit about two weeks after the first injections, followed by visits roughly every four weeks. The injection dates and the palbociclib week off follow separate schedules. Call the clinic if you cannot attend.

Tests and monitoring during treatment

You usually have a blood count before you start, at the beginning of each cycle and part-way through the first two cycles. Your team may change how often you need these checks. Palbociclib can lower the number of white cells that fight infection. You can feel well even when the count is low. A pause or dose reduction may help the cells recover. Wait for your team to confirm the next start date if it has asked you to hold treatment.

The team may check liver tests and ask about breathing, bowel symptoms and injection discomfort. Scans and changes in how you feel help assess whether the treatment is working.

Side effects

Common side effects

- **Low white blood cells and infection risk.** Call promptly if you have a fever, shaking chills or feel suddenly unwell. Keep a thermometer at home and the 24-hour number handy.
- **Tiredness or breathlessness.** Low red blood cells can contribute. Tell your team about new breathlessness, dizziness or difficulty doing usual tasks.
- **Nausea, diarrhoea or mouth soreness.** Follow the symptom plan and call if you cannot drink enough.
- **Injection discomfort, hot flushes and aches.** Tell the nurse if an injection area remains painful or if you develop pain or numbness down the leg.
- **Hair thinning or a change in appetite.** Ask for help if these changes affect how you feel or how much you can eat.

Less common and important side effects

Palbociclib can rarely cause lung inflammation. Tell your team promptly if you develop a new cough or difficulty breathing. Low platelets can cause bruises or bleeding. Report unexplained bruises, bleeding gums or nosebleeds. Contact the team if your skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow.

When to seek urgent help

Call your hospital’s 24-hour cancer care number straight away for fever, shaking chills, sudden illness, a new cough, worsening breathlessness, unexpected bleeding or trouble drinking. Follow your hospital’s temperature instructions. If you have no written threshold, call at 37.5°C (99.5°F) or above, or below 36°C (96.8°F). Call even if your temperature is normal when you feel very unwell.

Seek emergency care for severe breathing difficulty, chest pain, collapse, swelling of the face or throat or bleeding that will not stop. Tell staff you are taking palbociclib and having fulvestrant injections.

Practical advice for this treatment

Keep separate reminders for pills and injections

Palbociclib is taken in cycles with a regular break. Fulvestrant is given by injection and uses a different timetable, including more closely spaced visits at the start. Mark both on the calendar and copy any changes made after a blood test. Ask the pharmacist whether the pack contains tablets or capsules, as food instructions can differ.

Ask who to call about fever

Palbociclib often lowers infection-fighting white blood cells. Keep your scheduled counts even if you feel well, and follow your hospital's instructions for fever or sudden illness. Ask whether travel, an overdue blood test or a newly prescribed antibiotic changes when you should restart the tablets.

Keep an up-to-date medicines list

Some supplements, grapefruit and certain antibiotics or antifungals can affect palbociclib levels. Tell the nurse if you take a blood thinner before your fulvestrant injection. Explain any persistent pain, numbness or weakness after an injection.

Medicines, interactions and vaccinations

Check new medicines and herbal products with the oncology pharmacist. Grapefruit can change how much palbociclib is in your blood. Check the label and avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice during treatment. Ask the team before any vaccination, especially a live vaccine. Tell anyone arranging a blood test for oestrogen that you receive fulvestrant, because it can affect some test methods.

Everyday life

Use a calendar or reminder to track the days you take palbociclib, the days off, your blood tests and injection visits. Keep medicine in its original pack and return leftovers to the pharmacy as instructed. Take your treatment list to other appointments.

Pregnancy, fertility and breastfeeding

Talk with your team before treatment if pregnancy is possible. The US fulvestrant label advises effective contraception if you could become pregnant, and avoiding breastfeeding, during treatment and for one year after the last fulvestrant dose. US palbociclib labeling advises contraception for at least three weeks after the last dose for people who could become pregnant, and at least three months for men with partners who could become pregnant. It also advises avoiding breastfeeding during treatment and for three weeks after the last dose. Your team can confirm the instructions for your products and calculate dates for both medicines.

After treatment

The team will tell you when to stop palbociclib and when your last injection is due. Ask if blood tests or symptom checks will continue and when your next appointment is.

Frequently asked questions

Are these medicines taken on the same schedule?

Palbociclib usually has three weeks on and one week off. Fulvestrant follows its own injection calendar.

Should I take it with food?

Check your pack. Palbociclib capsules are taken with food and tablets can usually be taken with or without food.

What if my next cycle is delayed?

Ask which blood tests to repeat and when the team will confirm your new start date.

Why am I having blood tests if I feel well?

Low white cells may cause no symptoms. Blood tests show whether it is safe to keep taking treatment or to start another cycle.

Why do I need an extra injection appointment at the beginning?

The early extra dose helps fulvestrant reach the intended level sooner. Your clinic will give you the dates.

What should I do about pain after an injection?

Tell the nurse if pain lasts, spreads down the leg or is accompanied by numbness or weakness.

What if I take a blood thinner?

Tell the team before your injections. They can consider the bleeding risk and plan your care with the prescribing clinician.

Will I need an ovarian suppression injection?

Some people do if their ovaries still make oestrogen. Ask your team whether it applies to your plan.

Can I take antibiotics or antifungals?

Ask the clinician and cancer pharmacist to check the specific drug. Some interact with palbociclib.

Should I call for a new cough?

Yes. It can have several causes, including infection and, rarely, inflammation in the lungs. Your team can assess it.

Does a dose reduction mean treatment has failed?

A reduction can help you continue with fewer side effects. Your team assesses benefit using scans and how you are doing.

How long will I need treatment?

Your team reviews how well it is working and how you are tolerating it to decide whether to continue.

Can I take an extra tablet if I miss or vomit a dose?

Take your next scheduled palbociclib dose at the usual time. If you are unsure which day of the cycle you are on, check with the team before taking another tablet or capsule.

Individual medicine guides

- Palbociclib
- Fulvestrant

Sources and further reading

Read this guide alongside your hospital's plan. Ask your pharmacist to confirm the exact product dispensed in India and follow the instructions for that product.

Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) and prescribing information

- Palbociclib (Ibrance) - EU SmPC
- Fulvestrant (Faslodex) - EU SmPC
- Faslodex US prescribing information
- Ibrance tablets US prescribing information
- Ibrance US prescribing information for tablets
- Faslodex US prescribing information

Additional sources

- Macmillan Cancer Support, palbociclib
- Macmillan Cancer Support, fulvestrant
- Cancer Research UK, palbociclib

Editorially approved by Dr (Prof) Vijay Agarwal

Professor and Lead Consultant - Medical Oncology

Review record updated: 14 November 2026 · Editorial review policy