MEDICINE INFORMATION

Tamoxifen (Soltamox)

Understand tamoxifen: how to take or receive treatment, monitoring, side effects and everyday care.

At a glance

Tamoxifen is mainly used to treat hormone receptor-positive breast cancer; in selected people at increased risk, it may also be prescribed to reduce the chance of developing breast cancer. Brand names include Soltamox. The practical instructions depend on the exact prescription and product supplied.

Your prescription and the instructions for your own product take priority over a general guide. Keep the medicine leaflet as well as your treatment plan, especially if the brand or formulation changes.

You do not need to remember every possible side effect. Start with the administration instructions and the section on urgent help. Most people experience only some of the effects described here. Tell your team about difficulties early: supportive treatment, a planned pause or a different medicine may make treatment easier to continue.

How it works

Tamoxifen is a selective oestrogen-receptor modulator, or SERM. It blocks oestrogen's growth signal in sensitive cancer cells while having different effects in some other tissues. It may be supplied as tablets or a prescribed oral liquid.

Is this treatment suitable for me?

The team assesses hormone-receptor findings, menopausal status, clotting history and the overall treatment aim. Tamoxifen can be used in different endocrine plans and may accompany ovarian suppression. The intended duration should be reviewed rather than assumed identical for everyone.

Your oncologist considers the biology of the cancer, treatments already received, other illnesses and your preferences. The aim may be to reduce the chance of cancer returning, control cancer that is present, or relieve symptoms. Ask which aim applies to you and how benefit will be assessed. The same medicine can be used for different lengths of time in different treatment plans.

A brand name alone does not tell you whether a medicine is suitable. The dose, formulation and other medicines in the plan also matter. Discuss the possible benefits and risks with your care team.

Before treatment

Mention previous clots, stroke, uterine problems, unusual vaginal bleeding, eye disease and liver problems. Review antidepressants and blood thinners. Tell the team about upcoming surgery or prolonged immobility so clot risk can be assessed in advance.

Bring an up-to-date list of prescription medicines, pharmacy medicines, supplements and traditional or herbal remedies. Include medicines used only occasionally, creams containing

hormones, and anything recently stopped. Mention previous allergies and describe what happened, rather than only naming the drug. Your pharmacist can check the whole list together.

Tell the team about any planned operation, dental procedure, travel or difficulty attending appointments. Discuss costs and supply before the first dose if obtaining regular refills may be difficult. Agree who will arrange repeat prescriptions and tests. Keep your own hospital's daytime and out-of-hours contact details where you and a caregiver can find them quickly.

If pregnancy is possible, the team should confirm a negative pregnancy test before treatment starts.

How to take or receive treatment

A common dose is 20 mg daily, but follow the prescribed total and schedule. Tablets can generally be taken with or without food. If a liquid is prescribed, use the supplied oral measuring device and confirm its concentration; do not use a household spoon or assume every liquid has the same strength.

Take a missed dose when remembered unless the next is nearly due; then omit it. If an entire day has passed, do not take an extra day's dose. After vomiting, do not automatically repeat. Ask before crushing tablets; a suitable licensed liquid may be an option.

Swallow the medicine as directed for your product. Do not crush, open, dissolve or divide it unless the oncology pharmacist has confirmed a safe method for that exact formulation. Some products have a specific dispersion method; this is different from crushing tablets yourself. Tell the team before starting if swallowing is difficult or you use a feeding tube.

After vomiting a dose, do not automatically take a replacement because some medicine may already have been absorbed. Follow the drug-specific instructions in this section and call the team if vomiting persists. A missed dose and a vomited dose are different situations, so use the relevant rule.

Store tablets or capsules in their labelled packaging, out of children's sight and reach, away from heat and moisture, within the temperature limits on the pack. Keep any drying container supplied in the bottle. Ask before transferring anticancer medicines into an organiser. A caregiver should avoid direct contact with damaged tablets or powder and follow the pharmacy's handling advice; pregnant caregivers should not handle damaged anticancer tablets. Wash hands after handling. Return unwanted doses to a pharmacy rather than putting them into household waste or a drain.

Use a calendar or a phone reminder that records what was actually taken or given. A tick made after a dose is more useful than one made in advance. If someone helps with medicines, agree who records each dose so it is not accidentally repeated. Keep the drug name, strength and current instructions together; an old prescription may no longer describe your current dose.

Contact the treating team if a supply problem or illness is likely to interrupt treatment. Do not stretch the supply by taking smaller doses or lengthening intervals yourself. If you receive too much medicine, seek urgent advice and have the packaging and dose times available. Do not induce vomiting.

US Soltamox oral solution contains 20 mg in 10 mL. Keep it in its original packaging at room temperature, protected from light; do not refrigerate or freeze it. Discard any remaining solution

three months after first opening. Other liquids can have different concentrations or instructions, so check the exact bottle with your pharmacist.

Monitoring your treatment

The team reviews adherence, menopausal symptoms and treatment benefit. Arrange periodic blood counts and liver tests with the team. Lipid checks may also be needed, particularly if levels were already high. Report new visual changes and any abnormal vaginal bleeding during or after treatment. If you have a uterus, discuss regular gynaecological review; the US product information recommends annual examinations. Routine sampling of the womb lining is not recommended solely because you take tamoxifen when there are no symptoms.

Monitoring has two purposes: checking whether treatment is helping and detecting problems that may be silent at first. Your schedule depends on the medicine, any partner treatment and your general health. Ask which results need to be reviewed before the next prescription or injection, and who will contact you if a result is abnormal.

Record symptoms that affect eating, walking, sleep or daily activities, along with when they began. Bring this record to appointments. A single symptom or blood result rarely explains the whole picture; the team may compare trends, examination findings and scans. Feeling well is welcome, but it does not remove the need for planned monitoring.

Common side effects

Effects to discuss with your team

Hot flushes, sweating, nausea, leg cramps, fatigue and vaginal discharge or dryness may occur. Periods may become irregular or stop, but this does not establish infertility. Discuss symptoms rather than stopping long-term treatment without review.

This medicine alters how oestrogen acts at its receptor. Its effects are not identical in every tissue, which helps explain why a treatment that blocks oestrogen signalling in cancer can have other hormone-related effects elsewhere. Hot flushes, sweating, nausea and changes in vaginal discharge may occur; their severity varies between people.

If you have a uterus, report unexpected bleeding, a change in bleeding pattern, bloody discharge or persistent pelvic pressure. Bleeding after menopause always needs assessment. These symptoms often have non-cancer causes, but they should not be assumed to be a routine side effect. Continue the gynaecological review advised for your treatment.

Clots are an important concern. Tell the team about previous clots, clotting disorders, smoking, major surgery or long periods of reduced mobility. New one-sided painful leg swelling needs urgent assessment; sudden breathlessness or chest pain requires emergency care. Preventive aspirin is not a substitute for an individual clot-risk assessment.

Do not use hormone replacement therapy, hormonal contraception or over-the-counter hormone products without checking with the team. If another clinician prescribes treatment for hot flushes or depression, ask for an interaction check. There are often alternatives, but existing medicines should not be stopped abruptly on your own.

Making symptoms easier to manage

Tell the team which symptom is causing the most difficulty. Describe its effect on ordinary tasks: for example, whether pain prevents dressing or tiredness stops you preparing food. This helps the team choose practical support and judge whether treatment needs adjustment. Avoid waiting until the next routine visit if symptoms are worsening.

For mild nausea, try smaller meals and regular sips of fluid, following any food rule for the medicine. Ask about an anti-sickness medicine if needed. Repeated vomiting, inability to keep fluids down or very little urine needs prompt advice. If you have been told to restrict fluids for another illness, use that plan rather than forcing extra drinks.

Energy and emotional wellbeing

Pace demanding activities and allow rest, but keep some gentle movement in your day if you can. Persistent exhaustion deserves assessment; poor sleep, anaemia, low mood and other illnesses may contribute. Tell the team about persistent anxiety, sadness or loss of interest. If you feel at risk of harming yourself, seek emergency help and ask someone to stay with you.

Important side effects

The effects below are important because they may require tests or a change in treatment. They are not a prediction that you will develop them. New symptoms can also come from the cancer or an unrelated illness. Reporting them promptly allows the team to work out the cause; do not assume that everything is a routine treatment effect.

Important risks include venous clots, stroke, changes in the uterine lining including endometrial cancer, eye problems and liver injury. Rare severe skin reactions and high calcium can occur. Tamoxifen-related clot and uterine risks must be balanced against its individual anticancer benefit.

When to get urgent help

Sudden chest pain, breathlessness, coughing blood or stroke symptoms require emergency care. One-sided painful leg swelling needs urgent assessment. Report unexpected vaginal bleeding, bloody discharge, pelvic pressure, jaundice or new visual disturbance promptly, including after treatment has ended.

Get emergency help immediately for severe breathing difficulty, swelling of the tongue or throat, collapse, a seizure, severe chest pain, or signs of a stroke such as a drooping face, new arm weakness or difficulty speaking. Do not drive yourself if you are faint, confused or seriously unwell, and do not wait for an oncology callback before seeking emergency care.

Contact your oncology team the same day for repeated vomiting, dehydration, new jaundice, a rapidly worsening rash, or a sudden major change in how you feel. Fever with shaking chills or feeling acutely unwell also needs prompt advice, particularly if you receive another treatment that can lower white blood cells. Follow the temperature threshold and emergency instructions given for your complete regimen.

When asking for help, give the medicine name, last dose or injection date, other cancer treatments and main symptoms. Mention any blood thinner or steroid. If you cannot reach the team and the

problem is urgent, use your hospital's emergency service rather than waiting for the next appointment.

Other medicines and vaccinations

Strong CYP2D6 inhibitors such as paroxetine and fluoxetine can reduce formation of an active tamoxifen metabolite; discuss alternatives with the prescriber rather than stopping antidepressants abruptly. Warfarin and medicines affecting QT rhythm also need review. Avoid adding HRT or another endocrine anticancer tablet without instructions.

Ask the oncology pharmacist to check new medicines before you start them, including antibiotics prescribed elsewhere. Do not stop essential treatment for another illness on your own. If an interaction is possible, the prescribers can choose an alternative, adjust a dose or arrange monitoring. Herbal products labelled natural can still alter drug levels or have hormone-like effects.

Vaccination advice depends on your complete treatment plan. Hormone treatment alone does not automatically mean that every vaccine is unsuitable. Ask about influenza, COVID-19 and other recommended vaccines; live vaccines need a specific check if you also receive chemotherapy, an immune-suppressing medicine or certain doses of steroid. Tell the vaccination service all the treatments you receive.

Strong enzyme-inducing medicines, such as rifampicin, can lower tamoxifen exposure and should be reviewed before use. Tell the pharmacist about all antibiotics, seizure medicines and herbal products.

Everyday life

Food and movement

Aim for regular meals with enough protein and a varied range of foods that you can tolerate. Tell the team about unplanned weight loss, rapid weight gain or difficulty eating. A dietitian can adapt advice to diabetes, kidney problems, bowel symptoms or a restricted appetite. Do not start a restrictive diet or high-dose supplement as a substitute for treatment.

Choose activity that suits your strength and balance. Short walks or gentle exercises may be easier to sustain than occasional strenuous sessions. If cancer affects your bones, or you have osteoporosis, ask which movements and resistance exercises are safe before starting a new programme. New focal bone pain should be assessed rather than exercised through.

Work and travel

Many people continue some usual activities, but flexibility helps while you learn how treatment affects you. Discuss rest breaks, shorter hours or help with physically demanding work if needed. Avoid driving or operating machinery when dizzy, sleepy, confused or affected by visual symptoms. Follow any additional driving advice after a seizure or loss of consciousness.

Plan travel around prescriptions, injections and tests. Carry an up-to-date medicine list and enough supply for the agreed trip, with advice about storage and time-zone changes. For long journeys, discuss mobility and your individual clot risk. Do not start aspirin or a blood thinner simply because you are travelling.

Relationships and support

Changes in energy, body image or sexual function can affect relationships. You can ask for help privately, with or without a partner present. There may be practical measures or specialist support for discomfort and intimacy. A caregiver can help record symptoms and organise appointments while leaving treatment decisions and personal information under your control.

Fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding

Use effective non-hormonal contraception during treatment. Current UK product information includes a nine-month interval after stopping for patients who could become pregnant; some other labels still state shorter intervals. Do not shorten precautions using an older leaflet: ask your oncologist to document the interval for your product and regimen. Do not breastfeed during treatment. The US Soltamox instructions also require avoiding breastfeeding for three months after the last dose; confirm the interval for your own product before restarting.

Tell the team before treatment if having children in the future matters to you. Fertility preservation needs discussion before exposure where possible. Reduced fertility is not the same as reliable contraception, and an absence of periods or reduced sexual function does not prove that pregnancy is impossible.

Ask your team which contraception to use and how long to continue it, taking account of every medicine in your regimen. A partner drug may require a longer precaution period than this medicine alone. If pregnancy is suspected in you or a partner during a risk period, contact the treating team promptly for individual advice. Do not make pregnancy or breastfeeding decisions from a generic time interval without checking your own treatment plan.

After treatment

Continue to report abnormal vaginal bleeding after stopping. Confirm whether treatment ends or changes to another endocrine medicine. A planned pause for pregnancy or surgery is a specialist decision, not a general recommendation to interrupt therapy.

Before a planned stop, confirm which medicines end, which continue, and when the next review is due. Return unused medicine through the pharmacy's recommended route; do not give it to another person. Keep a record of the last dose and any side effects that still need follow-up.

Changes caused by treatment may settle gradually, and some need ongoing support. Report persistent symptoms or new problems after treatment rather than assuming they will disappear on their own. Continue the agreed follow-up and screening plan. If treatment is being changed, ask your team to help you update your treatment schedule so that old and new instructions are not accidentally combined.

Common questions

Does stopping periods mean tamoxifen is contraception?

No. Periods can change without reliable prevention of ovulation or pregnancy. Use a non-hormonal method agreed with your team. Ask your team how long to continue these precautions because current product recommendations are not identical across all labels.

Should I stop my antidepressant?

Do not stop it abruptly. Certain antidepressants can reduce activation of tamoxifen, so the oncology and mental-health prescribers should review the combination. An alternative may be possible while protecting both cancer treatment and emotional wellbeing.

Is vaginal bleeding always a sign of cancer?

No, but it needs assessment, especially after menopause or if it is unexpected. Tamoxifen can affect the uterine lining in several ways. Report bleeding, bloody discharge or pelvic pressure promptly rather than assuming a harmless treatment effect.

Can I pause tamoxifen for a long flight or operation?

Do not decide independently. Surgery, immobility and individual clotting history affect the plan. The team can advise whether a pause or preventive treatment is needed and give precise stop and restart dates.

Is this the same as chemotherapy?

It is a hormonal or hormone-related treatment, with a different way of working from conventional chemotherapy. It still needs careful prescribing and monitoring. If chemotherapy or a targeted medicine is part of your plan as well, read the information for that medicine because the combined treatment may have additional risks.

How will I know whether treatment is helping?

Your team will explain which symptoms, blood tests, examinations or scans are useful in your situation. Improvement may take time, and some treatments aim to prevent future problems rather than produce a change you can feel. Keep review appointments even when you feel well.

Does having few side effects mean the medicine is not working?

No. Side effects are not a reliable measure of benefit. People can respond to treatment without feeling particularly different. Equally, having troublesome effects does not prove that the cancer is responding. Decisions should use your clinical assessments and test results.

Can I take a break when I feel tired?

Do not create your own breaks or change the dose. Contact the team about fatigue and explain how it affects your day. They may look for another cause, offer support or prescribe a planned adjustment. A supervised change can be safer than repeated unrecorded missed doses.

How long will I need this medicine?

The duration depends on the aim of treatment, response and tolerability. Some plans have a proposed end date; others continue while the balance of benefit and side effects remains favourable. Ask when this will be reviewed. Another person taking the same medicine may appropriately have a different schedule.

Can I use herbal or Ayurvedic products alongside treatment?

Show the pharmacist the ingredients and exact product before using it. Products may affect hormone activity, liver function or the way medicines are handled in the body. Different preparations with similar names can contain different ingredients. A claim that a product is natural does not establish that the combination is safe.

Should I stop my usual medicines?

Continue them unless a prescriber tells you otherwise, but arrange a full interaction check. Include occasional painkillers, supplements and any newly prescribed medicine. If an interaction is found, the team can agree a safe change without leaving another illness untreated.

What should I do if I need surgery or dental treatment?

Tell both teams about your cancer medicine well in advance. They may need to consider bleeding, clotting, steroid support, bone-protecting treatment or appointment timing. Do not stop treatment based on a general internet rule. Ask your team when to pause and restart treatment, and keep the instructions handy.

Can someone else manage my medicines for me?

Yes, if you want that support. Agree one shared record of doses and appointments and ask the pharmacist about safe handling. A caregiver should know the urgent symptoms and where to seek help. Do not share this prescription with anyone else, even if their diagnosis sounds similar.

What if I cannot obtain the next supply or attend the clinic?

Contact the treating service before treatment is due where possible. Give the drug name, formulation and date of the last dose. The team can address supply or reschedule safely. Do not substitute another hormone medicine, ration tablets or assume a delayed injection has no consequences.

When should I seek help instead of waiting for my review?

Use emergency care for severe symptoms such as breathing difficulty, collapse, chest pain, stroke symptoms or a seizure. Contact the oncology team promptly for a new or worsening problem that affects normal activities. The urgent-help section gives additional signs especially relevant to this medicine.

Sources and further reading

Information checked against the following sources on 28 September 2026. Product names and instructions can differ between formulations and countries; your treating team should confirm the instructions for your supplied medicine.

- Macmillan Cancer Support - Tamoxifen
- Cancer Research UK - Tamoxifen
- US prescribing information on DailyMed - tamoxifen

Additional sources

Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC)

- Nolvadex (tamoxifen): Summary of Product Characteristics - emc