

Fulvestrant (Faslodex)

This booklet explains what the drug fulvestrant is, how it works, when it may be prescribed, what the benefits are and what side effects may occur.

Fulvestrant is the generic (non-branded) name of the drug, and is how it is referred to in this booklet. Its brand name is Faslodex.

What is fulvestrant?

Fulvestrant is a type of hormone treatment known as an oestrogen receptor down-regulator (see 'How does it work?'). It's suitable for women whose breast cancer is sensitive to the hormone oestrogen.

Who might be offered fulvestrant?

Fulvestrant is used to treat women who have gone through the menopause (post-menopausal).

It's given to women whose breast cancer has spread to areas around the breast, such as the lymph nodes above or below the collarbone (regional recurrence), or to other parts of the body (secondary breast cancer).

It may also occasionally be prescribed for pre-menopausal women depending on individual circumstances. Your specialist team will discuss with you what they recommend and why.

How does it work?

The hormone oestrogen can play a part in stimulating some breast cancers to grow. Fulvestrant will only be prescribed if your breast cancer has receptors within the cells that bind to the hormone oestrogen and stimulate the cancer to grow. This is known as oestrogen receptor positive or ER+ breast cancer.

This will usually have been tested using tissue from a biopsy or after surgery for your primary breast cancer. However, if you have secondary breast cancer your specialist may discuss taking a sample of tissue from the site of the secondary breast cancer to retest the hormone receptors. This will depend on your individual situation.

Fulvestrant works by blocking the action of oestrogen on the cancer cells. It binds to the oestrogen receptors, making them change shape and stop working. It also reduces the number of oestrogen receptors in the breast cancer cells. This is called down-regulation.

If your cancer is oestrogen receptor negative, then fulvestrant will not be of any benefit to you.

When is fulvestrant prescribed?

Fulvestrant may be prescribed if your breast cancer has progressed while you are taking, or after you have had, other hormone treatments. It can still be effective after other hormone therapies have stopped working because it works in a different way.

You may also be offered fulvestrant as part of a clinical trial.

How is fulvestrant given?

Fulvestrant is given by two injections, one in each buttock. These are known as intramuscular (IM) injections.

It's usually given every two weeks for the first three doses, then once a month. It may be given either at the hospital or at your local doctor's surgery.

How long will I be given fulvestrant for?

You will usually be given fulvestrant for as long as it keeps your breast cancer under control. This will vary from person to person and your specialist team will talk to you about your individual situation.

Can I take fulvestrant with my other drugs?

You should not take drugs containing oestrogen, such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT), while you are having fulvestrant.

As fulvestrant is given by injection, you need to tell your specialist if you are taking any anti-coagulants (blood-thinning drugs).

What are the possible side effects?

Most people having fulvestrant have mild side effects. However, everyone reacts differently to drugs and some people experience more side effects than others. The main side effects are listed here. You may have some or none of these.

If you have persistent side effects from fulvestrant, tell your specialist team so that they can decide how best to manage them.

Common side effects

As with most hormone treatments, you may have menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes or night sweats. For further information about reducing these symptoms see our **Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer** booklet. You may also like to read our **Complementary therapies** booklet.

You may also experience nausea (feeling sick).

Less common side effects

Other possible side effects include:

- vomiting
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- general weakness or lack of energy
- urine infections
- constipation
- skin rashes
- headaches
- bone or joint pain.

A small number of people experience temporary pain and inflammation around the injection site.

Fulvestrant also increases the risk of deep vein thrombosis or DVT (a blood clot in a deep vein, usually in the leg). Tell your doctor straight away if you have a swelling or pain in your leg. People with DVT are at risk of developing a pulmonary embolism. This is when part of the blood clot breaks away and travels to the lung. If you experience shortness of breath, chest pain or cough up blood you need to see a doctor urgently.

Fulvestrant can cause changes in your liver. This doesn't usually cause any symptoms but your specialist team will ask you to have regular blood tests to check if your liver is working properly.

Rare side effects

Rare side effects include vaginal discharge or vaginal bleeding, which may occur in the first few weeks of treatment, usually after changing from another hormone therapy to fulvestrant. If you have vaginal bleeding at any time, tell your doctor or breast care nurse.

Fulvestrant can reduce the number of platelets, which help the blood to clot. This may mean you bruise or bleed more easily. Tell someone in your specialist team if this happens.

Helping you face breast cancer

A diagnosis of secondary breast cancer can be overwhelming. And the support you need might feel like it's hard to come by. We're here to help. Meet other women with secondary breast cancer and get specialist information on topics relevant to you with our Living with Secondary Breast Cancer services. We can help you feel less alone and more in control to make confident decisions about your treatment, lifestyle and care.

Ask us

Our free Helpline is here to answer any questions about breast cancer and talk through concerns. Or you can Ask the Nurse by email via our website.

Free Helpline **0808 800 6000** (Text Relay 18001)
Monday–Friday 9am–5pm, Saturday 10am–2pm
www.breastcancercare.org.uk/ATN

Meet people like you

Come along to our free Living with Secondary Breast Cancer meet-ups for a chance to chat and share experiences with people who understand what it means to live with secondary breast cancer.

They're also a unique opportunity to increase your knowledge as we run longer sessions with guest expert speakers every other month. Topics include pain management, fatigue, claiming benefits and side effects of treatment. Call 0345 077 1893 or visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk to find out more.

Talk to someone who understands

Exchange tips on coping with the side effects of treatment, ask questions, share experiences and talk through concerns at our website's discussion Forum. There's a dedicated area for people with secondary breast cancer – it's easy to use and professionally hosted. Live Chat sessions exclusively for people living with secondary breast cancer take place weekly in a private area of our website. Each session is facilitated by an experienced moderator and a specialist nurse who can point you to sources of help and information – but for most people, being able to talk to others who know what you're going through is what counts.

We're here for you: help us to be there for other people too

If you found this booklet helpful, please use this form to send us a donation. Our information resources and other services are only free because of support from people such as you.

We want to be there for every person facing the emotional and physical trauma of a breast cancer diagnosis. Donate today and together we can ensure that everyone affected by breast cancer has someone to turn to.

Donate by post

Please accept my donation of **£10/£20/my own choice of £**

I enclose a cheque/PO/CAF voucher made payable to
Breast Cancer Care

Donate online

You can give using a debit or credit card at
www.breastcancercare.org.uk/donate

My details

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email address _____

We might occasionally want to send you more information about our services and activities

- Please tick if you're happy to receive email from us
- Please tick if you don't want to receive post from us

We won't pass on your details to any other organisation or third parties.

Please return this form to Breast Cancer Care, Freepost RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG,
5-13 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0NS



About this booklet

Fulvestrant (Faslodex) was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



**For a full list of the sources
we used to research it:**

Phone 0345 092 0808

Email publications@breastcancercare.org.uk



You can order or download more copies from
www.breastcancercare.org.uk/publications



**For a large print, Braille, DAISY
format or audio CD version:**

Phone 0345 092 0808

Email publications@breastcancercare.org.uk





the breast cancer
support charity

Breast Cancer Care is the only UK-wide charity providing specialist support and tailored information for anyone affected by breast cancer.

Our clinical expertise and emotional support network help thousands of people find a way to live with, through and beyond breast cancer.

Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call us free on **0808 800 6000** (Text Relay 18001).

Central Office

Breast Cancer Care
5–13 Great Suffolk Street
London SE1 0NS
Phone: 0345 092 0800
Email: info@breastcancercare.org.uk

Registered charity in England and Wales 1017658
Registered charity in Scotland SC038104
Registered company in England 2447182