Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Tamoxifen

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Brand Names: US

Soltamox

## Brand Names: Canada

APO-Tamox; Nolvadex D [DSC]; TEVA-Tamoxifen

### Warning

- This drug may raise the chance of very bad and sometimes deadly side effects like stroke, blood clots, or endometrial or uterine cancer.

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat breast cancer.
- It is used to lower the chance of breast cancer in people

who are at high risk. It is also used in people who have an early form of breast cancer (DCIS) to lower the chance of it spreading.

- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

## What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have a blood clot, have ever had a blood clot, or have been told you are at risk of getting a blood clot.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Anastrozole, letrozole, or warfarin.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Carbamazepine, phenobarbital, phenytoin, rifabutin, rifampin, or St. John's wort.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug or for 3 months after your last dose.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and

health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by your doctor.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your health care providers and lab workers that you take this drug.
- This drug may raise the chance of getting cataracts or the need to have cataract surgery. Talk with the doctor.
- Be sure to have regular breast exams and gynecology check-ups. You will also need to do breast self-exams as you have been told.
- Other cancers have been reported with this drug. It is not known if this drug was the reason for the other cancers. If you have questions, talk with your doctor.
- This drug may stop you from having a period (menstrual

bleeding) for some time. This is not a method of birth control.

- This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. A pregnancy test will be done before you start this drug to show that you are NOT pregnant.
- If you may become pregnant, you must use a non-hormone type of birth control (like condoms) while taking this drug. You will also need to use birth control for 2 months after your last dose unless you have been told otherwise. Be sure you know what type of birth control to use and how long to use it. If you get pregnant, call your doctor right away.

## What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI) like blood in the urine, burning or pain when passing urine, feeling the need to pass urine often or right away, fever, lower stomach pain, or pelvic pain.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Change in eyesight.
- New breast lump.
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Swelling.
- Any skin change.
- Sudden, severe headache or throwing up.
- Cough.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Fever, chills, or sore throat; any unexplained bruising or bleeding; or feeling very tired or weak.
- Call your doctor right away if you have signs of a blood clot like chest pain or pressure; coughing up blood; shortness of breath; swelling, warmth, numbness, change of color, or pain in a leg or arm; or trouble speaking or swallowing.

- If you are female, call your doctor right away if you have pain when passing urine, pelvic pain or pressure, period (menstrual) changes like no period, vaginal bleeding that is not normal, or vaginal discharge.
- Some males have had sexual problems when taking this drug. These include lowered interest in sex and not able to get an erection. Call your doctor right away if you have sexual problems when taking this drug.
- High calcium levels have happened with drugs like this one in some people with cancer. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of high calcium levels like weakness, confusion, feeling tired, headache, upset stomach or throwing up, constipation, or bone pain.
- Rarely, liver problems have happened with this drug. This includes some cases of liver cancer. Sometimes, liver problems have been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.

## What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects

or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Hot flashes.
- Constipation, diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, or throwing up.
- Weight gain or loss.
- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Back, bone, joint, or muscle pain.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Anxiety.
- Headache.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1- 800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

## How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

## All products:

- Take with or without food.
- Keep taking this drug as you have been told by your doctor or other health care provider, even if you feel well.
- If you are able to get pregnant, start taking this drug during your period (menstrual) cycle. If you are not sure when to start taking this drug, talk with your doctor.

## Tablets:

- Swallow whole with some water or other drink.

## Liquid:

- Only use the measuring device that comes with this drug.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- If you are not sure what to do if you miss a dose, call your doctor.

## How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

### Tablets:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

### Liquid:

- Store at room temperature. Do not refrigerate or freeze.
- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Store in original container.
- Keep lid tightly closed.
- Throw away any part not used 90 days after opening.

### All products:

- Protect from heat and light.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

## General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all

information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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