

# Caring for Breast Cancer Survivors

## What to do:

- Annual history and physical exam including a thorough breast or chest wall exam
- Patient education about potential symptoms of recurrence, e.g. new breast lumps, bone pain, persistent headaches, worsening dyspnea
- Annual mammography (excludes women with bilateral mastectomy)
- Recommend regular gynecological follow up
- For patients on aromatase inhibitors:
  - DEXA scans every 2 years
  - Optimize bone health with calcium and vitamin D
  - Consider denosumab every 6 months for primary fracture prevention

## What NOT to do:

- “Routine” lab tests
- Tumor markers
- Breast MRI (unless the patient meets high-risk criteria, e.g., BRCA mutation, prior chest irradiation)
- Other imaging tests for screening in the absence of new symptoms (e.g., CXR, PET, CT, bone scan)
- Screening transvaginal ultrasound

## What to know:

**In most patients, continue hormonal therapy (tamoxifen or an aromatase inhibitor) for a total of 10 years**

### ABOUT AROMATASE INHIBITORS

- Drugs: Anastrozole (Arimidex) 1 mg daily  
Letrozole (Femara) 2.5 mg daily  
Exemestane (Aromasin) 25 mg daily
- If side effects intolerable consider (a) trying a different AI or (b) switching to tamoxifen
- Potential harms include osteoporosis, hyperlipidemia and cardiovascular events

### ABOUT TAMOXIFEN

- Potential harms include:
  - VTE
  - cataracts
  - endometrial cancer
- Check drug interactions (e.g., warfarin, SSRIs/SNRIs)

Hormonal therapy	Common side effects	Treatment
Aromatase Inhibitors	musculoskeletal symptoms (arthralgia, myalgia, bone pain)	NSAIDs, glucosamine chondroitin, exercise, acupuncture; imaging if progressive
Aromatase Inhibitors, Tamoxifen	hot flashes	acupuncture, avoid triggers, consider venlafaxine (Effexor) 37.5mg
Aromatase Inhibitors, Tamoxifen	vaginal dryness, sexual dysfunction	non-hormonal moisturizers and lubricants (Hyalo GYN gel, vitamin E, coconut oil); low-dose vaginal estrogens (Vagifem, Estring)
Tamoxifen	vaginal bleeding	endometrial biopsy or hysteroscopy, usually by gyn



### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### CONTACT US: