

Aromatase Inhibitor-induced arthralgia: symptoms and treatment options

The breast cancer treatment you have been prescribed can cause joint pain, sometimes called arthralgia. The symptoms of arthralgia are characterised by stiffness of the joints and persistent, dull pain. In addition, normal activities such as walking or bending may cause sharp and stabbing pain. Arthralgia can occur because of infections or diseases of the joints, as well as from general wear and tear due to aging, overuse or injury.

Arthralgia typically occurs within the first 6 months of starting aromatase inhibitor therapy. If you begin to experience symptoms, it is very important that you continue to take your breast cancer treatment, as the symptoms can be managed whilst ensuring that you continue to benefit from the cancer treatment. You should go back to your doctor, so that you can discuss with him/her how best to relieve the pain.

Various treatment options are available to restore your normal day-to-day functioning. Which treatment is best for you will depend on how severe your joint pain is, and whether you have any other medical conditions which do not allow you to take certain types of drugs.

If your pain is mild, you may find that making some small changes to your lifestyle, such as exercising gently and losing weight may be enough to reduce the pain.

If your pain is more severe, your doctor can prescribe a treatment to help alleviate the pain.

To ensure that you get immediate relief from pain, most of these treatments will be prescribed at a high-dose at the beginning, and will gradually be reduced once your normal day-to-day functioning has been restored. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

References

1. ATAC Trialists' Group. *Lancet* 2005; 365: 60-62.
2. Coates AS *et al.* *J Clin Oncol* 2007; 25: 486-492.
3. Coombes RC *et al.* *Lancet* 2007; 369: 559-570.

The importance of continuing **Aromatase Inhibitor treatment**

The aromatase inhibitor that you have been prescribed to treat your breast cancer is very important in reducing the chances of your cancer returning. Even after your tumour has been removed by surgery, it is possible that there are still some cancerous cells within your body. The aromatase inhibitor helps to ensure that these cells cannot grow into new tumours and/or spread to other parts of your body.

Although the benefits of taking an aromatase inhibitor for several years may not be as immediately obvious as the benefits of the surgery, it is important to think of the future. Taking an aromatase inhibitor gives you the best possible chance of living a healthy, cancer-free life for many years to come.

Like many drugs, aromatase inhibitors do have some side effects. About 1 in 3 women receiving aromatase inhibitor treatment will develop arthralgia or joint pain.

This joint pain should not be a reason to stop your cancer treatment. In most patients, joint pains can be successfully managed. Stopping your aromatase inhibitor treatment may put you at risk of your cancer returning.

Your doctor will be aware that you may develop joint pain if you have been prescribed an aromatase inhibitor, and he/she will be able to discuss with you how your symptoms can be successfully relieved.