

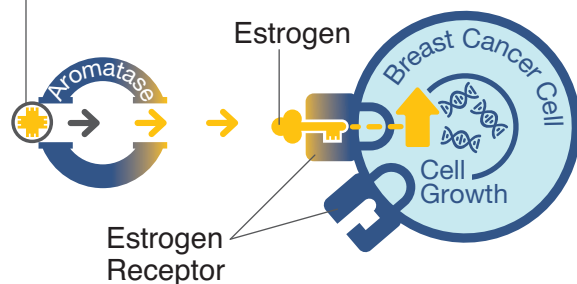
## 7. How does this medication work?

Approximately 80% of breast cancers have “estrogen receptors” (ER) on the cancer cells. These ER+ cancers are fed by the female hormone **estrogen**, which attaches to the ER. Estrogen can be made anywhere in the body by the enzyme aromatase from hormones called androgens.

Aromatase inhibitors block aromatase (except in the ovaries of women who are still having menstrual periods) and this stops the body from making estrogen. This can help stop ER+ cancers from growing.

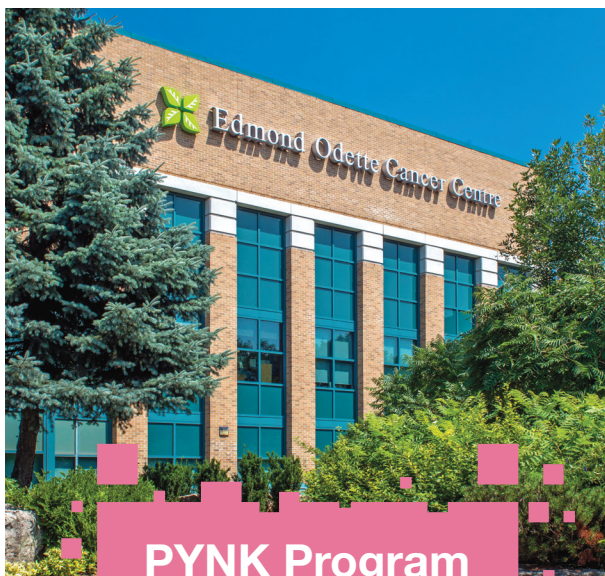
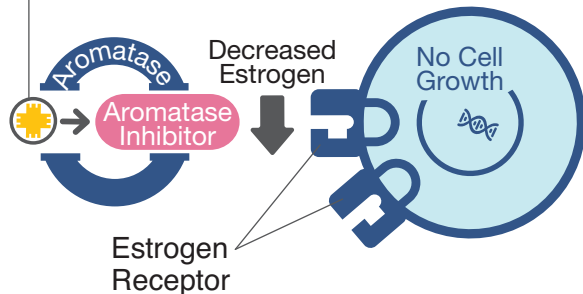
### No Aromatase Inhibitor:

Androgen (Adrenal glands make androgens)



### With Aromatase Inhibitor:

Androgen (Adrenal glands make androgens)



## PYNK Program

For more information, visit:

**Odette Cancer Centre**  
2075 Bayview Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M4N 3M5

[sunnybrook.ca/pynk/medications](http://sunnybrook.ca/pynk/medications)

The information presented in this brochure illustrates general concepts and provides an overview of common side effects; however, some rare events may have been excluded. For more information, speak with a member of your oncology team, or consult Cancer Care Ontario's website.

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## Aromatase Inhibitors

 **Sunnybrook**  
ODETTE CANCER CENTRE

## 1. Why am I being prescribed an aromatase inhibitor?

To try to:

- Stop a new estrogen receptor positive (ER+) breast cancer from developing OR
- Stop your ER+ breast cancer from returning OR
- Shrink your ER+ breast cancer and stop it from spreading to other parts of the body.

**Letrozole** (Femara®), **anastrozole** (Arimidex®), and **exemestane** (Aromasin®) are three different aromatase inhibitors that may be prescribed.

## 2. If I still get a menstrual period, can I use this drug?

Aromatase inhibitors do not block estrogen from being made in the ovaries of women who have menstrual periods.

If you have had a menstrual period in the past year, you will need to get an injection every 4 weeks to stop your periods OR need surgery to remove your ovaries.

## 3. How do I take this medication?

Aromatase inhibitors are pills you take once a day with or without food. If you miss a pill, do not take 2 pills at the next dose.

## 4. What are the common side effects of aromatase inhibitors and how can I manage them?

### Hot flashes

- You may sweat, feel warm and have flushing of the face.
- Wear light clothes and avoid alcohol, caffeine, and sugar to reduce symptoms.
- Exercise helps reduce these symptoms.

### Joint stiffness and aches

- 1 out of 3 women will have pain and body aches.
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help with stiffness and joint pain.
- Exercise helps to reduce these symptoms.

### Bone thinning

- Bone density decreases on these medications.
- Low bone density raises your risk of breaking a bone in the future.
- It is important to take in enough calcium (1200 mg) and vitamin D (1,000 - 2,000 IU) every day to reduce bone loss. This can be taken through your diet and/or supplements.
- Weight-bearing exercise and medications help maintain bone density.
- Your doctor may order a test to check your bone density.

### Vaginal dryness

- Vaginal moisturizers can treat and prevent vaginal dryness.
- Lubricants can help make you more comfortable during sex.

## 5. Can I take this medication with other medications or natural health products?

Some natural health products contain estrogen and should not be used with estrogen-lowering medications.

Speak with a pharmacist and/or your doctor before you take other prescription medications, supplements, or natural health products.

## 6. What should I do if I feel unwell on this medication?

Severe side effects are rare with aromatase inhibitors. If you are worried that your symptoms might be caused by this medication, stop taking it and tell your nurse or doctor right away.



**If your symptoms are caused by your aromatase inhibitor another medication can be prescribed.**