

Wellness during Tamoxifen Treatment: Integrative Oncology Approaches

A collaboration of KNOWoncology.org, Cancer Choices and the Patterson Institute for Integrative Oncology Research

Tamoxifen

Tamoxifen is a medication used to reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence. Although it's an important treatment, it may cause side effects such as hot flashes, weight gain, mood changes, joint pain, and muscle pain. Using integrative approaches may be helpful in managing some side effects from tamoxifen.



Integrative Oncology

Integrative oncology is an approach to cancer care that focuses on the whole person. It combines research-based methods such as mind-body practices (e.g., yoga, acupuncture), natural health products, and healthy lifestyle changes alongside standard cancer treatments. The goal is to improve health, quality of life (how you feel day to day), and treatment outcomes (how you respond to treatment). It also supports people in taking an active role in their health care—before, during, and after cancer treatment.¹ It is important to consider interactions, dosing, and quality of any natural health products used. Please connect with a naturopathic doctor (www.oncANP.org) or integrative oncology professional (<https://knowintegrativeoncology.org/providers>) for specific guidance.

Side Effects and Quality of Life

Hot Flashes

Exercise and Mental Wellbeing - Exercise, yoga, and practicing relaxation (such as slow deep breathing, or listening to an audio meditation) may lower the number and strength of hot flashes. [2,3,4,5,6](#) Working with a counselor to manage stress through thinking and behavior, also called “cognitive behavioral therapy”, may help lower hot flashes. [7](#)

Diet - Avoiding spicy foods, caffeine, and alcohol may reduce hot flashes. [5](#)

Acupuncture and **Traditional Chinese Medicine** may reduce hot flashes. [8,9,10](#)

Black cohosh may or may not help reduce hot flashes. [11,12,13](#) Black cohosh does not increase estrogen, is probably safe for use with tamoxifen, and may improve sexual function. [14,15](#)



Side Effects and Quality of Life

Fatigue

Exercise – Exercise, including aerobic (“cardio”), lifting weights, yoga, Tai Chi, and qigong, are all helpful for lowering fatigue. [16,17](#) The intensity of the exercise can be low to moderate. [18](#)

Mental Wellbeing - Working with a counselor and taking some time in peace to focus on your experience whether it’s thoughts, prayer, or checking in on how your body feels, are also good ways to help manage fatigue. [18](#)

Managing other health problems – managing and resolving issues like pain, depression, trouble sleeping, and poor nutrition may help fatigue. [18](#)

Reishi - Ganoderma lucidum (reishi mushroom) may increase energy and mood in breast cancer survivors. [19](#)



Side Effects and Quality of Life

Quality of Life and Additional Support

Mindfulness and Relaxation

Relaxation exercises and mindfulness-based practices can help people sleep better and improve their quality of life. [16,17](#) Exercise, yoga, and relaxation techniques (e.g. – paced respirations, mindfulness-based stress reduction) may improve joint pain and sleep quality. [2](#)

Natural Health Products

Melatonin may improve sleep and reduce depression in breast cancer survivors. [20, 21](#) In people with advanced breast cancer, melatonin may help tamoxifen work better and improve quality of life. [22, 23](#)

CoQ10 helps lower blood fats (lipids), reduce inflammation, and lower tumor markers in people using tamoxifen. [24, 25, 26, 27, 28](#) CoQ10 may also improve physical health, and cognitive function. [29](#)

Vitamin C can lower inflammation and oxidative stress in people taking tamoxifen. [30](#)

Reishi mushroom may help boost the immune system, improve sleep, and support brain health in women on tamoxifen or other estrogen-blocking medications. [31](#)

Fish oil may improve depression, mood, and sleep in women taking hormone blocking medications. [32](#)

Vitamin D3 deficiency is common in breast cancer survivors and this deficiency may reduce quality of life. [33, 34](#) Taking a vitamin D supplement is recommended to treat deficiency and support bone health. [35](#)

Reducing Cancer Recurrence and Improving Survival

Exercise

Being physically active after a breast cancer diagnosis can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer, as well as other causes like heart disease. [36](#)

Nutrition

Eating a diet high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, olive oil, and limiting alcohol is recommended for breast cancer survivors. [5](#) This way of eating is in line with a Mediterranean-style diet, which has been associated with a lower risk of breast cancer recurrence. [37](#)

- In the DIANA-5 clinical trial, breast cancer survivors who closely followed a Mediterranean diet had a 41% reduction of cancer recurrence compared to those who were not compliant with the diet. [37](#)

Specific Foods and Nutrients

- **Soy** - Soy foods are safe for breast cancer survivors taking tamoxifen. [38,39](#) Some studies show soy may improve survival or reduce recurrence while others found no harm or benefit. [40,41,42](#) Soy may also help with heart health and stroke prevention. [43](#) Choose whole soy foods like soy milk, tofu, edamame, tempeh, and miso.
- **Ground Flax** - Ground flax is a safe, high-fiber food that can be eaten every day. It doesn't interfere with tamoxifen and may help it to work better. In general, avoid taking high-fiber foods like flax at the same time as medications. [44](#)
- **Green Tea** - Drinking green tea may help prevent breast cancer from returning and is safe to use with tamoxifen. [45,46](#)
- **Vitamin C** - Getting vitamin C from food or supplements is linked to a lower risk of death for breast cancer survivors. [47,48](#)

Other

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy may also reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer. [2](#)



Precautions

Some natural products could impact the effectiveness of tamoxifen (e.g., Diindolylmethane (DIM) and curcumin). Until more is known, it may be best to not use these as supplements or to discuss with your health care provider. [49,50](#)

Tips to be Proactive

Follow the 7 Lifestyle Healing Practices:

If you smoke, consider seeking support to help you quit.

- Move toward a healthy body weight and exercise daily. [51](#)
- Reduce stress, anxiety, and improve your quality of life with relaxation, meditation, and yoga. [6](#)
- Aim for a Mediterranean diet including more olive oil, vegetables, and fruit every day. [37](#)
- Try acupuncture to help with depression, anxiety, fatigue, pain and hot flashes. [8](#)
- Surround yourself with a supportive health care team! Ask your oncology center about integrative medicine services such as massage, acupuncture, naturopathic medicine, counseling, nutrition, Reiki, laughter therapy, music therapy, yoga, and other supportive care.
- For more information on these and other healing practices, see [CancerChoices](#).



Authors/Editors

Heather Wright, ND; Sarah Soles, ND; Casey Martell, ND, MBA; Julie Robinson, ND; Laura Pole, RN, MSN, OCNS; Christine Mineart, MPH; Gwen Stritter, MD; Pallav Mehta, MD; Dugald Seely, ND, MSc; Ellen Conte, ND; Jen Green, ND

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