Letrozole and Palbociclib

What is Letrozole (LET-ruh-zahl) and how does it work?

Letrozole is a type of oral, targeted cancer therapy called an “aromatase inhibitor”. Another name for this drug is Femara. This drug dissolves in your digestive system and is absorbed into your blood stream. In women who have gone through menopause, estrogen is produced by fat tissue in the body. Letrozole blocks the production of estrogen from fat tissue. Letrozole is made in a laboratory. This type of treatment is different from chemotherapy and is also known as “endocrine” or “hormone blocking therapy”.

What is Palbociclib (PALB-o-si-clib) and how does it work?

Palbociclib is a type of oral, targeted cancer therapy called a “cyclin D kinase inhibitor.” Another name for this drug is Ibrance. This drug dissolves in your digestive system and is absorbed into your blood stream. Palbociclib works by stopping the cancer cell’s growth cycle, causing them to lose their ability to divide and spread. Palbociclib is made in a laboratory.

Why am I getting two drugs for my cancer?

This treatment is used for postmenopausal women with estrogen receptor (ER)-positive, advanced breast cancer. The two drugs work together to stop the growth of cancer cells. The combination of Letrozole (Femara) and Palbociclib (Ibrance) works best when both drugs are given together, as compared to using either drug alone.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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What should I tell my doctor before starting this treatment?

Talk to your doctor about the following:

- If you have ever had liver or kidney problems.
- If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant. Your doctor will talk with you about birth control before and while getting chemotherapy.
- If you are breastfeeding.
- If you have been told that you need to start a new medicine.
- The medicines/pills you are taking, including:
  - Medicines prescribed by any of your doctors
  - Herbs
  - Vitamins
  - Over-the-counter medicines

How does my doctor decide my treatment dose?

To determine your treatment dose, your doctor will review the following:

- Your white blood cell counts
- Your medicines
- How well your liver and kidneys are working
- Any other health problems you have

How do I handle, store and dispose of these drugs?

- **There are special safe handling instructions for this medicine.** Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about the precautions you need to follow when taking this medicine at home.
- Store these medicines at room temperature, away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- **Do not** store in your bathroom or refrigerator.
- **Palbociclib comes from the pharmacy in individually wrapped containers.**
- Keep these medicines away from children and **do not** share it with anyone.
- **Disposal:**
  - Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about how to get rid of prescription medicines safely.

How do I take Letrozole?

- Your dose is 2.5 mg (one tablet) every day, for Days 1 through 28 of the cycle.
- This medicine is taken **once a day** at about the same time every morning.
- Swallow the tablet whole with a **full glass of water, with or without food.**
- If you miss a dose by more than 6 hours, wait until it is time for your next dose, and skip the missed dose. **Do not double up on doses.**
- **Do not** take another dose if you vomit.

How do I take Palbociclib?

- **Do not** crush, break, or chew the tablet.
- See the prescription label on your medicine bottle for how many tablets to take each day and how often the tablets should be taken.
- There is a check **(√)** in the box by your dose of Palbociclib:

  ☐ 125 mg

  ☐ 100 mg

  ☐ 75 mg

- One "cycle" is 4 weeks:
  - ► On days 1 to 21 (first 3 weeks of the cycle), take 1 tablet **each day**. Take this medicine around the same time each day.
  - ► On days 22 to 28 (the last week of the cycle), **do not** take any Palbociclib.
- Swallow the tablet whole with a **full glass of water, with or without food.**
- You may take Letrozole and Palbociclib at the same time.
- **Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice, Seville oranges or star fruit.** This can increase your risk of side effects
- If you miss a dose by more than 6 hours, wait until it is time for your next dose, and skip the missed dose. **Do not double up on doses.**
- **Do not** take another dose if you vomit.
- Your doctor may change your dose in the future to find out what works best for you. Taking a lower dose of Palbociclib does not mean the medicine will not work.

What are the side effects of this treatment?

Every person responds differently to treatment. You may experience any of the following with **Palbociclib**:

Most common side effects

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Fatigue or weakness
- Diarrhea
- Mouth sores
- Infection
- Low white blood cell counts (can increase risk of infection)
- Low red blood cell counts (can lead to tiredness and weakness)
- Hair thinning
- Rash

Common side effects

- Low platelet counts (can lead to easy bruising and bleeding)
- Decreased appetite
- Nosebleeds

Every person responds differently to treatment. You may experience any of the following with **Letrozole**:

- Headache, joint or muscle pains
- Hot flashes
- Menopause symptoms (can include fatigue, mood changes, depression, discomfort with intercourse or loss of interest in sex)
- Vaginal changes (can include dryness and skin irritation)
- Urinary tract infections
- Osteoporosis (decrease in bone density)
- Changes in your cholesterol or triglyceride levels

When should I call my doctor?

You should call your doctor right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher

> **A fever can be life-threatening if not treated. Your doctor may ask you to go to the hospital.**

- Open sores on your tongue or in your mouth
- Nausea that prevents you from eating or drinking
- Diarrhea (4 or more loose stools in 24 hours) or diarrhea at night
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Swelling of your face, lips or throat
- Call your doctor if you start any new medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, or herbal supplements)

Is there anything else I should know about this treatment?

- Palbociclib (Ibrance) may cause changes in your blood counts. Your doctor will want to check your blood counts at the start of this treatment, every 2 weeks for the first 2 months and then every 1 to 3 months.
- This treatment may make it harder for your body to fight infections. Wash your hands often and avoid people who are sick.
- You should drink 8 to 10 eight-ounce glasses of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic fluids each day throughout your treatment. It is important to keep hydrated while you are receiving treatment.

You may also find it helpful to watch The James Patient Education videos at **http://cancer.osu.edu/patientedvideos** to help you learn tips for managing treatment side effects.