

## Supported Self-Management

### How to manage the side effects of hormone therapy

This video will talk about the management of the side effects you may experience from having hormone therapy for prostate cancer.

#### How does hormone therapy work?

Hormone therapy works by either stopping your body from making testosterone, or by stopping testosterone from reaching the cancer cells. This can control the cancer.

Prostate cancer cells usually need testosterone to grow. Testosterone is a hormone that controls how the prostate grows and develops. It also controls muscle strength, erections, and the size and function of the penis and testicles.

#### What are the side effects of hormone therapy and what can you do you help manage them?

Your healthcare team will discuss in detail with you about the side effects of hormone therapy, these are usually caused by low testosterone levels and affect people in different ways.

Side effects can include

- **Hot flushes** – These can vary from a few seconds of feeling overheated to a few hours of sweating. You may find it helpful to keep a diary of your hot flushes for a few weeks. This can help you work out if there are any situations or particular foods or drinks which bring on a hot flush. Stopping smoking and staying a healthy weight can also help.  
There are medicines which may help relieve the symptoms of hot flushes or reduce how often you get them. You can discuss these with your Healthcare Team.
- **Fatigue** – For some patients this extreme tiredness can affect their everyday life. See our video on Fatigue Management for advice.
- **Weight gain** – some patients put on weight whilst on hormone therapy, particularly around the tummy. Physical activity and a healthy diet can help you stay a healthy weight. It can take a long time to lose any weight that you put on during hormone therapy.
- **Loss of muscle mass** – Regular gentle resistance exercise such as lifting weights or using elastic resistance bands may help prevent muscle loss and keep your muscles strong.
- **Decreased sexual function** – Hormone therapy can affect your sex life in different ways. See our video on managing erectile dysfunction for information and advice.
- **Breast swelling or tenderness** – Talk to your Healthcare team about options to reduce your risk of swelling and tenderness or help treat it.

- **Loss of body hair** – Testosterone plays a role in hair growth. So when reducing your testosterone you might lose some of it. The hair should grow back if you stop hormone therapy.
- **Bone thinning** – long term hormone therapy can make your bones weaker. Lifestyle changes such as being more active and changes to your diet may help reduce your risk of bone thinning. Regular physical activity could help to keep you strong and prevent falls that could cause broken bones.
- **Changes in mood** – You may feel more emotional, get mood swings, or just feel different to how you felt before. Just knowing that hormone therapy might be causing these feelings can help. If your mood is often very low, you are losing interest in things, or your sleep pattern or appetite has changed a lot, speak to your health care team. These can be signs of depression but there are things that can help.
- **Loss of concentration or Memory issues** – you may find it difficult to concentrate on certain tasks, or remember things as well as you used to. We don't know for sure if these changes are caused by hormone therapy or by other factors as the evidence isn't very strong. Feeling tired, stressed or anxious can also affect your memory or concentration. Whatever the cause you may find problems with memory or concentration frustrating. You can talk to your Healthcare Team who can suggest things that may help.

The effects improve with time, but it is important you know support is available for you. **If you have any concerns about your side effects or get any new symptoms, such as bone pain, speak to your Healthcare team.**

### **Risk of other health problems**

Evidence suggests that having hormone therapy might increase the chance of developing other health problems such as

- heart disease
- a stroke
- Type-2 diabetes

If you already have any of these health problems, talk to your healthcare team before you start hormone therapy. They will work with you to manage these conditions.

Although this sounds worrying there are things you can do to help:

- **Be physically active.** Putting it simply – move more and sit less. Vary your activities to improve all areas of fitness and to prevent boredom.
- **Eat a balanced diet:** aiming for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, ensuring you have a protein source at each meal, opting for lower fat food choices, limiting salt intake and ensuring you have adequate calcium and vitamin D.
- **Stop smoking.**
- **Aim for a healthy weight** – if you are gaining weight, consider how to make healthier foods more accessible to you. If you are losing weight, try to eat little and often.
- **Cutting down on alcohol.**
- **Look after your wellbeing.**

**Further Support**

If you would like to discuss aspects of this video or you have concerns, please contact your Healthcare team. Useful links can also be found in your handbook.

**Thank you**