

InfoSheet : LETROZOLE

Letrozole is a drug primarily used for the treatment of breast cancer. It is called an aromatase inhibitor and acts by interrupting the metabolism of estrogen. As a result it decreases the levels of estrogen in the body. The pituitary gland (which is in the brain) monitors the levels of estrogen in the body. When the estrogen levels drop, the pituitary gland produces more of a hormone called FSH – follicle stimulating hormone – which stimulates the ovaries and results in more follicles (which contain the eggs) developing. In other words, it acts as a fertility drug by inducing the ovaries to ovulate.

Letrozole has recently been studied at the University of Toronto as a fertility drug. The work done so far has found it to be very effective in inducing ovulation with resulting pregnancy. These studies have found that the drug appears to be completely eliminated from the body within a few days of the last tablet.

So far there is no evidence that this drug has any harmful effects on the developing baby. It therefore appears to be safe as a fertility drug.

The other oral agent which is commonly used to induce ovulation is clomiphene citrate. This has been used in fertility treatment for over 30 years. However, Clomiphene is not effective in everyone and, because of its anti-estrogen properties, can have an adverse effect on the eggs and on the developing endometrium (i.e. the uterine lining) In such patients Letrozole might be a good alternative before proceeding to injectable drugs (which are far more expensive and carry higher risks of multiple pregnancies).

However, like many other drugs used in medicine, Letrozole is not marketed for use as a fertility drug. Therefore, this would be what is called an “off-label” indication.

The evidence is that Letrozole is safe for women and for ovulation induction. But, like every other drug, it is important that you know as much about the medication you take as possible.

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