

Finasteride

What is Finasteride?

Finasteride is a type of medication known as a 5 alpha reductase inhibitor (5ARI), which inhibits the conversion of Testosterone to the more highly active Dihydrotestosterone (DHT). By diminishing DHT, conditions that are exacerbated by male hormone levels can be halted and potentially reversed.

What conditions is Finasteride used to treat?

Finasteride is licensed to treat Male Pattern Hair Loss (1mg dose) and Benign Prostatic Hypertrophy (5mg), enlargement of the prostate that often effects urine flow. It is unlicensed in women but has been used as experimental treatment for Female Pattern Hair Loss and Frontal Fibrosing Alopecia.

How long would I need to stay on this medication?

Finasteride needs to be continued to have long term benefit. In male pattern hair loss, one would continue for as long as one wants to maintain their current hair density. When Finasteride is used experimentally in conditions like Female Pattern Hair Loss and Frontal Fibrosing Alopecia, it is typically used for 6-18 months to assess for benefit and then continued if it helps the underlying condition.

What are the side effects?

Finasteride is very well tolerated. Most patients will be unaware that they are taking a medication at all and will experience no problems. The original trials had less than 2 in 100 drop out of the study due to any problems and this was the same amount as the control group who were taking placebo. Finasteride only works against one of two 5 alpha reductase enzymes, which are only located at certain sites; These include the hair follicle and prostate, which probably explains why it is so well tolerated. It diminishes DHT but actually slightly increases Testosterone. Nevertheless, some sexual side effects can occur with decreased sex drive (libido) being experienced by 1.6%, erectile dysfunction in 1.3% and decreased ejaculate in 1.2%. Breast tissue tenderness and breast tissue enlargement can occur but is rare at the 1mg dose. A very small number of men may experience a lowering of mood.

What is Post Finasteride Syndrome?

Post Finasteride Syndrome (PFS) is a controversial phenomenon that is yet to be widely accepted by the medical profession. There is no scientific explanation or studies that prove PFS but more research is necessary. PFS has been described as "Persistent sexual, neurological and physical adverse reactions in patients who have taken 5 AR inhibitor in the treatment of either hair loss or enlarged prostate". It should be noted that it is the experience of most clinicians that any side effects are usually reversed on stopping treatment and PFS, if a genuine phenomenon, only effects a very small number of men. It is also important to note that more men experience side effects if they have been pre-warned about the potential side effects, what is known as the "Nocebo" effect, which may point to a psychosomatic explanation of PFS.

