

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. Its mechanism of action in women is unknown but it may be altering hormones in some way.

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 female 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 did not include women and therefore there is no clinical trial data on side effects. Sexual side effects can occur with decreased sex drive (libido). Breast tissue tenderness and breast tissue enlargement can occur. A very small number may experience a lowering of mood. In several published cohorts of women taken finasteride for FFA, there have been no concerning signals but this does not exclude the possibility of rare side effects.

What about hormone based cancers?

There have been no published reports of cancer due to Finasteride in women. However, we don't know what this medication could be doing to female hormone levels implicated in hormone driven cancer processes, eg ovary, breast, uterine. If you have a strong family history of any of these conditions, it may be best to avoid this medication.

