

21. How is hormonal therapy used to treat breast cancer?

Hormonal therapy keeps cancer cells from getting the hormones they need to grow. This treatment may include the use of drugs that change the way hormones work. Sometimes it includes surgery to remove the ovaries, which make female hormones. Like chemotherapy, hormonal therapy can affect cancer cells throughout the body. Often, women with early-stage breast cancer and those with metastatic breast cancer -- meaning cancer that has spread to other parts of the body -- receive hormone therapy in the form of tamoxifen. Hormone therapy with tamoxifen or estrogens can act on cells all over the body. However, it may increase the chance of developing endometrial cancer. If you take tamoxifen, you should have a pelvic examination every year to look for any signs of cancer. A woman should report any vaginal bleeding, other than menstrual bleeding, to her doctor as soon as possible.