

Finasteride Treatment for Hirsutism



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What is hirsutism?

Hirsutism is the medical term for increased body hair growth in women. It affects about 7 in 100 women in the UK. For the majority, it is a mild problem that they accept as 'normal' for them. Other women will use simple cosmetic measures to deal with increased hair growth, such as plucking, hair removal creams, waxing or sugaring, or they may simply disguise their hair growth by using over-the-counter hair bleaching treatments.

A minority of women will have more severe hirsutism that is either more extensive, noticeable, or has not responded to simple cosmetic measures. They will often have additional problems with acne, increased greasiness of their skin, or irregular periods. These women may need to consider hormonal or drug treatments to deal with their hirsutism.

The range of possible treatments include:

- Metformin (a drug to reduce the insulin level in your blood stream).
- A standard oral contraceptive pill.
- Dianette (a contraceptive pill specifically developed for women with acne and hirsutism).
- Cyproterone acetate (a drug which suppresses the small amount of male hormone all women produce).
- Finasteride (another drug which suppresses the small amount of male hormone, which in turn blocks the hormones action on the hair follicle).
- Vaniqa cream (blocks the enzymes necessary for the hair to grow).

These treatments should only be prescribed after careful assessment and blood investigations.

What causes hirsutism?

The majority of women with hirsutism have polycystic ovarian syndrome. This is a genetically determined condition which causes an increased amount of 'active' testosterone (male hormone) in a woman's bloodstream. The problem is more severe in women who are overweight. Weight reduction and an evenly distributed food intake over the course of each day may be advised as part of their treatment.

The second, much less common, cause is 'idiopathic' hirsutism. Although this name suggests that doctors do not know the specific cause, it is generally due to increased sensitivity of the body cells, particularly the cells in the skin, to testosterone. This is due to increased activity of enzymes which affect testosterone causing increased hair growth.

Women with polycystic ovarian syndrome have increased testosterone levels increase hair growth.

What is Finasteride?

Finasteride is a drug that was introduced during the early 1990s. It reduces the activity of 5-alpha reductase. It works by reducing the ability of testosterone to stimulate the prostate gland. At present, Finasteride is only licensed for treatment in men with this condition.

In the mid-1990s it was recognised that Finasteride might also be a useful treatment for women with hirsutism. The initial research was very encouraging. There have now been a large number of studies showing that it is effective in reducing body hair growth. It has very few side effects but there are understandable concerns about its use in women who may get pregnant. In theory, it might interfere with normal sexual development of a baby who was exposed to the drug during the critical stages of early pregnancy. At present, the pharmaceutical company who produce Finasteride give very specific advice that it should not be taken by women who may conceive during

treatment. They also advise that women should not even handle any crushed or broken Finasteride tablets and their partners should not be taking the drug either, if they are trying for a pregnancy.

Because of this strongly worded guidance from the manufacturer, many GPs are reluctant to prescribe Finasteride and many pharmacists will not dispense it for women without checking with the doctor who has issued the prescription. For these reasons, we would normally initiate treatment with Finasteride only in women who are using very reliable contraceptive methods.

This will be either a contraceptive pill, an intra-uterine contraceptive device (coil), or where the woman or her partner have previously been sterilised.

What are the possible side effects?

Patients who are hypersensitive may get a skin rash or swelling around their lips and mouth. This would be an indication to stop treatment. Occasionally, some women will notice a slight reduction in their sexual drive. The other possible side effect is interference with the function of cells in the liver. This would be monitored by a blood test before beginning treatment, after 3 months, and then annually whilst taking Finasteride.

How will my treatment be prescribed and monitored?

The initial prescription would be issued by the hospital outpatient clinic. The doctor in the clinic will send a form to your own GP to ask if s/he is happy to share the responsibility for prescribing and monitoring your treatment. Any blood tests would usually be organised by your GP, who would also give you a further prescription.

You would be seen in the hospital clinic 6 months after starting treatment. This will be to check that you are starting to get

some improvement in your hirsutism. You would then be seen once a year in the clinic. Your GP would prescribe your Finasteride between these appointments and would refer you back to the clinic if you had any problems.

How long will I need to take my treatment?

Body hair has long growth cycles. Because of this, it may be 6 months before you start to notice any improvement in your hirsutism. It may take as long as 3 years before you get the maximum benefit from your treatment. At that stage, we would normally reduce your dosage and the number of additional treatments you may be taking. It is possible you will need to continue long-term treatment to maintain control of your hirsutism. This would usually be at a lower dosage.

Stopping Finasteride treatment

It is best for the dose of Finasteride to be reduced gradually, over a few months, before you stop taking it. If you find yourself pregnant, despite taking contraceptive precautions, or if you get side effects whilst taking Finasteride, you should stop your treatment straight away and contact the Consultant who initially prescribed it. The doctor who sees you for your regular appointments in the clinic will advise you when and how to stop your treatment.

Other questions?

If you have any further questions or concerns, the doctor in the clinic would be happy to discuss these with you. It is important that you feel completely comfortable about taking this treatment. We ask you to sign this information sheet to confirm that the implications of this treatment have been discussed with you.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that the implications of Finasteride treatment have been discussed with me by

Dr

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions about my treatment.

Signed

Name (block capitals)

.....

Date

Consultant's signature

Name (block capitals)

.....

Date

References and Useful organisations

Women's Health Concern

Advice on menopause, HRT and gynaecological conditions.

P. O. Box 2126, Dukes Pl, Marlow SL7 2QH

Helpline: 01628 890199

Website available at: www.womens-health-concern.org

Patient UK

www.patient.co.uk

WellBeing

Advice and information on all aspects of women's gynaecological and obstetric health. 27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London, NW1 4SP

Telephone: 020 3697 7000

Website available at: www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities.
Available at **www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution**

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How to contact us:



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and Gynaecology, Cotswold
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www.nbt.nhs.uk/gynaecology

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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