

One in six premenopausal early breast cancer patients do not adhere to hormonal therapy

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Lead author Barbara Pistilli, a medical oncologist at Institut Gustave Roussy, Villejuif, France. Credit: European Society for Medical Oncology

Nearly one in six premenopausal women being treated for early stage breast cancer do not adhere adequately to tamoxifen therapy after one year of treatment, potentially putting themselves at increased risk of recurrence and reduced survival, a French prospective study reports at

ESMO 2018.

Hormonal therapy such as [tamoxifen](#) is recommended for five to ten years in all patients with hormone receptor-positive [breast cancer](#) but previous research has shown that many discontinue long-term therapy.

"This issue is important because non-[adherence](#) with [hormonal therapy](#)—meaning taking less than 80% of prescribed [treatment](#)—can be associated with higher risk of mortality and shorter time to recurrence of breast [cancer](#)," said lead author Dr. Barbara Pistilli, a medical oncologist at Institut Gustave Roussy, Villejuif, France.

The French study is the first to assess adherence by measuring serum levels of tamoxifen rather than simply asking patients about how they take their treatment; there has previously been limited information on adherence to hormonal therapy in younger women.

"I was surprised at the high rate of non-adherence, which was considerably higher than reported previously," said Pistilli. "Women with breast cancer should be encouraged to discuss their treatment and any side-effects they experience with their doctor to obtain help to take their therapy."

The study included patients recently diagnosed with early (stage I-III) breast cancer in the CANTO cohort, which is a French prospective study investigating the long-term impact of side-effects with breast cancer treatments in around 12,000 participants. The researchers focused on the sub-group of 1799 (16%) premenopausal women prescribed adjuvant hormonal therapy, assessing their adherence to tamoxifen by measuring serum levels at one, three and five years and comparing this with patients' self-reports of adherence.

The study is also exploring clinical and social characteristics that could

impact on adherence to endocrine therapy with the aim of identifying patients most at risk of not taking endocrine therapy as recommended.

Results showed that nearly one in five (16.0%; 188/1177) of the premenopausal women prescribed tamoxifen were not adequately adherent at one year based on serum assessment of tamoxifen (defined as

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