



AROMATASE INHIBITOR

Failure for a woman to ovulate is responsible for about 20% of all female infertility. Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is responsible for the majority of this ovulation failure. Clomiphene Citrate (Clomid) remains the primary medication used to treat this anovulation. Use of Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) has been less successful due to the increased risk of ovarian over-stimulation and multiple pregnancy. Over the last 15 years many studies have evaluated alternatives to using Clomiphene.

WHAT ARE AROMATASE INHIBITORS?

These compounds have been evaluated extensively over the last 15 years of which Letrozole is the most studied. Letrozole works in a completely different way to Clomiphene but the end result is the same. Recent large trials have concluded that Letrozole is at least as effective as Clomiphene in inducing ovulation and producing a pregnancy.

ADVANTAGES OF LETROZOLE.

Aromatase inhibitors present with a number of advantages in that they do away with the known disadvantages of Clomiphene which is believed to be responsible for poorer pregnancy outcomes.

- a. Clomiphene is an anti-oestrogen and due to its long half-life accumulates in the body and has a detrimental effect on cervical mucus development. Letrozole is short lived and completely removed from the body after 1–2 days.
- b. Clomiphene resistance occurs in 15–20% of patients treated. This refers to persistent anovulation despite repeated treatment. There is no evidence to suggest that Letrozole fares any better in this group of women and IVF treatment is probably still the treatment of choice.
- c. Multiple Pregnancy. Clomiphene primarily acts at the level of the pituitary gland which leads to a significant proportion of women producing multiple follicles, which may each contain an egg, and subsequently multiple pregnancy. Letrozole on the other hand functions at the level of the ovary and there is no increase in follicle production and no increase in multiple pregnancy.

DOSAGE.

Letrozole is an oral medication the same as Clomiphene. The normal dosage of Letrozole is two to three 2.5mg tablets daily for 5 days from Day 3 of the cycle and often differs depending on the exact nature of the aromatase inhibitor used. Letrozole is available by prescription and your doctor will provide you with a prescription which can be filled at any pharmacy as is now the case for Clomiphene.

SIDE EFFECTS.

At present no significant side effects have been reported but this may change as more women are treated with this medication.