

Bisphosphonate Infusion and Denosumab Injection

Osteonecrosis of the Jaw

This is a significant side effect of bisphosphonates or denosumab - damage to the bones of the jaw. Occurs in less than 1% using zoledronic acid and less than 10% on denosumab.

It usually happens following an injury to the jaw, e.g. dental treatment or when a denture is cutting the gum. It is more likely in people who smoke, drink alcohol heavily, have diabetes, or are on steroid medication. You should report any pain, numbness or swelling of the jaw, teeth or mouth to your doctor or dentist as soon as possible. You need to maintain good dental hygiene and attend regular check-ups. You must inform your dentist that you are receiving bisphosphonates before any dental treatment, as any non-urgent invasive procedures may need to be delayed.

Rarely osteonecrosis can affect the ear - any ear pain or problems should also be reported to your doctor.

Eye pain or inflammation is another rare but significant side effect which should be reported promptly.

if you still have any concerns about your treatment, please contact your Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice Care nurse specialist or doctor

do I have to pay for services from Phyllis Tuckwell?

No, all services offered by Phyllis Tuckwell are free. As a charity we are dependent on the local community for their generosity and financial support. We only receive 20% of our funding from the NHS/Government and therefore we have to raise over £20,000 a day to provide all our services. If you would like to make a donation, please ask a member of staff, or visit our website.

Thank you.

Large print version available on request.

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Phyllis Tuckwell®
Hospice Care
...because every day is precious



what are Bisphosphonates?

Bisphosphonate drugs can be used to manage symptoms of secondary bone cancer - sometimes referred to as bone metastases.

Bone metastases can cause increased pain and increase the risk of fracture. Calcium, which helps strengthen bones, can be released from damaged bones into the bloodstream. When the level of calcium in the bloodstream is raised this is known as 'hypercalcaemia'.

how would I know if I had hypercalcaemia?

You might feel more unwell than usual and have some of the following symptoms:

- excessive thirst,
- nausea and vomiting,
- tiredness,
- irritability, confusion or feeling muddled,
- constipation.

If blood tests confirmed that hypercalcaemia was causing these problems, you might need to be admitted to the Hospice or hospital for more urgent treatment.

how do Bisphosphonates work and how will they help me?

These drugs help to strengthen the bones to reduce the risk of fractures, improve pain control and treat or prevent recurrence of hypercalcaemia. The most commonly used drug at Phyllis Tuckwell is Zoledronic Acid.

how long will I need this treatment for?

This varies for individual patients. Some patients with impaired kidney function will need to be monitored more closely. Sometimes a reduced dose may prove equally effective.

The doctor will monitor and review the benefits of ongoing treatment at each outpatient visit. If your consultant considers this treatment may be of benefit, you will be given it regularly every 4-6 weeks.

what happens if this treatment is recommended?

Firstly, we need to know that your kidney function is satisfactory. A blood test is taken one week before your proposed treatment.

We would recommend that your blood test is performed by the practice nurse at your GP surgery, or by your district nurse.

We also advise that you visit your dentist. They will need to know that you are starting on this treatment, and a full dental examination may be recommended. Any proposed dental work may delay or even prevent treatment with bisphosphonates.

how would the drug be given to me?

A fine needle, called a cannula, is inserted into a vein in your arm. This is connected to a 'drip' which is infused over a period of 15-20 minutes.

what is Denosumab?

This is a protein (monoclonal antibody) which is given to slow down bone damage caused by cancer. It is given as an injection into the skin in the thigh, abdomen or upper arm, usually every 4 weeks. The effect of treatment will be reviewed regularly by your doctor.

It can cause similar side effects to zoledronic acid including the risk of low calcium levels and osteonecrosis of the jaw or ear.

should I expect any side effects?

The following may occur:

- Flu-like symptoms - these may include aching joints and muscles, raised temperature, headache, chills and, more rarely, confusion.
- A temporary increase in your pain in an affected bone after the first few initial treatments. Your doctor will be able to prescribe pain relief until this side effect wears off.

- Reduced calcium levels to below normal.

NB: *Patients receiving regular treatments may have to take calcium supplements to prevent this from happening.*