



Zoledronic acid to improve outcomes in early breast cancer

This leaflet explains the use of zoledronic acid in early breast cancer to reduce the risk of cancer recurrence. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is zoledronic acid?

Zoledronic acid is a type of drug called a bisphosphonate. It is used to treat osteoporosis. This is a condition when the bones become thinner or weaker. Bisphosphonates have been very effective in advanced breast cancer through improving symptoms of secondary bone cancer.

Evidence for use

New research trials involving thousands of women have shown that zoledronic acid can prevent breast cancer from returning in women who have **been treated successfully** for **early** breast cancer .i.e. after surgery/radiotherapy and chemotherapy.

Research has also shown that using zoledronic acid in postmenopausal women significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer recurring in either the bone or elsewhere and also reduces the risk of dying of breast cancer¹. The benefit of zoledronic acid is similar to chemotherapy benefits which your doctor may have discussed with you.

Please do not hesitate to contact your consultant team if you need more discussion.

How do I take zoledronic acid?

Zoledronic acid is given by a drip (infusion) into the vein through a fine tube called a cannula. It is usually given in the outpatient department at the hospital. The infusion takes at least 15 minutes and is given every six months for three to five years.

Are there any side effects?

Some people have very few side effects while others may experience more. The side effects described on the next page will not affect everyone having zoledronic acid. We have outlined the most common side effects, but have not included those that are rare and therefore unlikely to affect you. If you notice any effects that are not listed here, discuss them with your doctor or nurse.

Increased pain

Some patients may experience pain for a short time after they have received their zoledronic acid injection. If this happens, your doctor can prescribe painkillers for you until it wears off.

Flu-like symptoms

These include a high temperature, chills, and pain in your muscles or joints for 24-48 hours. Please let your doctor know if these effects are troublesome. It may be helpful to take mild painkillers.

Less common side effects of zoledronic acid

Drop in calcium levels below the normal range. This is extremely rare and usually only temporary. It is unlikely to cause you any symptoms. Your blood calcium will be checked at the hospital before each zoledronic acid treatment.

Effect on the kidneys

Zoledronic acid can sometimes affect how your kidneys work. This does not usually cause any symptoms, and the effects are generally mild. Your doctor will check how well your kidneys are working during your treatment by doing blood tests before each treatment.

Red or sore eyes

You may develop red or sore eyes for a few days after your treatment. Your doctor can prescribe eye drops to ease this.

Anaemia (low number of red blood cells)

Symptoms of anaemia include feeling very tired and breathless. Your doctor can check whether you are anaemic by doing a blood test.

Headaches

This is not common, but it is important to let your doctor know if you are getting headaches. They will advise you about what medicines to take. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids immediately before and for a few days after your zoledronic acid treatment.

Feeling sick (nausea) and being sick (vomiting)

If this happens, your doctor can prescribe very effective anti-sickness (anti-emetic) drugs to prevent or greatly reduce the sickness.

Jaw problems (osteonecrosis)

A rare side effect of zoledronic acid is a condition called osteonecrosis of the jaw. This is when healthy bone tissue in the jaw becomes damaged and dies. Gum disease, problems with your dentures and some dental treatments, such as having a tooth removed, can increase the risk of this. Before you start taking zoledronic acid you will be advised to have a full dental check-up.

During treatment with zoledronic acid it is very important to look after your teeth by brushing them regularly and having routine dental check-ups. Always let your dentist know that you are being treated with zoledronic acid. Some of the symptoms of osteonecrosis can include pain, swelling, redness of the gums, loose teeth or a feeling of numbness or heaviness in your jaw. If you have any of these symptoms please tell your cancer specialist and dentist immediately.

The side effects and dental issues related to zoledronic acid are listed on the information sheets taken from Macmillan Cancer Support via the following link:

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/treating/supportive-and-other-treatments/bisphosphonates/zoledronic-acid.html

Please note that Macmillan's information is regularly updated. For the most up to date information please visit macmillan.org.uk

Is there anything else I need to know?

You may be asked to take calcium and vitamin D supplements while having treatment with zoledronic acid. Your doctor will let you know if this is necessary.

Non-cancer admission

If you are admitted to hospital for a reason not related to cancer, it is important to tell the doctors and nurses looking after you that you are having treatment with zoledronic acid or bisphosphonates. You should tell them the name of your cancer specialist so that they can ask for advice.

Emergency contacts

It is essential to know who you should contact if you have any problems or troublesome side effects when you are at home.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about zoledronic acid, or if you are unwell, please contact:

Acute Oncology Assessment Unit on 020 7188 3754

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6:30pm

Cancer Day Unit on 020 7188 6452

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6pm

Out of hours, please call the **Hospital Switchboard on 020 7188 7188**

Monday to Friday, 6:30pm to 8:30am. Weekends and bank holidays 8:30am to 6:30pm.

Ask for the operator, then ask to speak to the **oncology registrar on call** (or the **haematology registrar on call** if you are a haematology patient).

Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets. For information leaflets on other conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets



Dimbleby Cancer Care provides cancer support services for Guy's and St Thomas'. We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918 **e:** DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

Useful sources of information

Macmillan Cancer Support

t: 0808 808 00 00

w: www.macmillan.org.uk

Cancer Research UK

t: 0808 800 4040

w: www.cancerresearch.org.uk

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

References

1. **Adjuvant bisphosphonate treatment in early breast cancer: meta-analyses of individual patient data from randomised trials.** The Lancet, Volume 386, Issue 10001, 1353 – 1361.

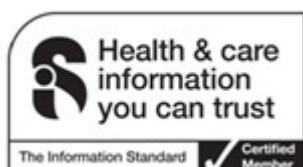
w: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60908-4/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60908-4/abstract) (Accessed 9th March 2017).


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