



Bone Density Medications and Dental Treatment Information

Bone density disorders such as osteoporosis, osteopenia and other disease related bone conditions are characterised by low bone mass and the deterioration in the microarchitecture of the bone quality leading to increased bone fragility.

Medications used to treat Bone Density Disorders

Medications are used to stabilise bone density by altering how bone cells work and heal. Among the medications used to treat bone density disorders are drugs called Bisphosphonates. These drugs can be administered orally in tablet form or by intravenous (IV) injection. Names for the commonly used oral medications are 'Fosamax', 'Actonel' and 'Actonel Combi' and common use IV bisphosphonates include 'Zometa' and 'Aclasta'. While not a bisphosphonate, another commonly used drug for bone density disorders is 'Denosumab', brand name 'Prolia'. Denosumab is given to patients as a six monthly injection.

You may be prescribed these drugs if you suffer from osteoporosis, other bone disorders or to manage cancer-related bone conditions. As a consequence of taking these medications there is a possibility that patients may develop bone healing problems.

What is medication-related osteonecrosis of the jaw?

On rare occasions, patients undergoing certain dental procedures who are taking medications for bone density disorders can acquire Medication-Related OsteoNecrosis of the Jaw (MRONJ). MRONJ is the localised death of bone in the upper or lower jaw.

What are the risks associated with dental treatment?

For ordinary dental treatment such as examinations, preventive care, fillings and dentures the risk of developing MRONJ is very low.

Dental treatment involving bone and bone healing such as extractions and/or oral surgery increases the risk associated with the development of MRONJ.

How likely am I to have bone healing problems caused by these medications?

Current studies suggest that problems are not common. Only around 1 in 1000 patients who take bone density medications in tablet form have complications after dental surgery.

If you are having intravenous bone density medication (injections) following the diagnosis of cancer, you have a higher risk, 1 in 15, in developing MRONJ after dental surgery.

This risk varies depending upon your individual condition, other medications you are taking and the planned dental treatment.



What are the risks associated with not having dental treatment?

You may be at increased risk of developing other health problems if a dental disease is not treated. Your dental practitioner will be able to discuss alternative treatment options and the risks associated with them. You should also consult with your doctor about any general health risks.

Can I decrease my risk of developing MRONJ?

There are several things you should do to reduce the risk:

- Visit your dental practitioner for regular dental check-ups.
- Ensure that you tell your dental practitioner about all the medications you are taking.
- Talk to your dental practitioner about oral hygiene because maintaining good oral hygiene is the best way to prevent oral diseases that may require dental treatment.
- Brush regularly with a soft toothbrush taking care around the gum line.
- Reduce the frequency of sugary snacks and drinks to reduce the potential for tooth decay.
- Reduce the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Do not smoke.

Are there signs and symptoms I should look out for?

You should contact your dental practitioner immediately if you notice any of the following symptoms after dental treatment involving bone:

- Feeling of numbness, heaviness or other unusual sensations in your jaw.
- Pain in your jaw or a bad taste.
- Swelling of your jaw.
- Exposed bone.

What is the treatment if MRONJ develops?

Your dental practitioner will refer you to a specialist oral surgeon to assess the MRONJ. The specialist may provide any or all of the following treatments:

- Prescribe analgesics (pain killers).
- Prescribe anti-bacterial mouthwash.
- Prescribe antibiotics.
- Undertake minor surgery to clean and debride the affected area.

Please ask your dental practitioner if you require further information.

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