



Use of Zoledronic Acid (Zometa®) To improve outcomes in early breast cancer

This leaflet explains the use of Zoledronic acid (Zometa®) 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 with a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Evidence for use

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 also been shown to be very effective in advanced breast cancer in improving symptoms of bone secondaries.

New research trials (involving thousands of women) have shown that Zoledronic Acid can prevent breast cancer from returning in women who have **no** disease, after surgery/radiotherapy and chemotherapy for **early** breast cancer. The research has shown that using Zoledronic Acid in **postmenopausal** women significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer recurring in either the bone by 28% or elsewhere. This also reduces the risk of dying of breast cancer by 18% after 10 years. The magnitude of benefit is similar to some of the chemotherapy benefits your doctor may have discussed with you.

The side effects and dental issues related to Zoledronic Acid are listed on the information sheets taken from Macmillan Cancer Support.

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

How Zoledronic Acid works

In normal bone, two types of cells called osteoclasts and osteoblasts work together to shape, rebuild and strengthen existing bone. Zoledronic Acid works by stopping the action of osteoclasts which normally destroy old bone. In postmenopausal women who are diagnosed with breast cancer, their bones may be more susceptible to attack from breast cancer cells. Zoledronic acid helps strengthen the bones and protect against any tumour cells settling in the bone tissue.



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How Zoledronic Acid is given

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 at 0, 3, 6 months then every 6 months for three years.

You will be asked to have a blood test, no more than one week before your treatment appointment.

The first blood test form will be given in clinic and the following forms will be given by the nurse that treats you in the day unit.

Possible side effects of Zoledronic Acid

Some people have very few side effects while others may experience more. The side effects described here 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, or wish to discuss the rare side effects please speak with your doctor or specialist nurse.

Flu-like symptoms

These include a high temperature, chills, and pain in your muscles or joints. Let your doctor know if these effects are troublesome. It may be helpful to take your usual pain relief.

Other 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.

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 prior to your treatment by doing blood tests.

Red or sore eyes

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're anaemic by doing a blood test.

Headaches

It is important to let your doctor know if you are getting headaches. They will advise you about what medicines to take. It's also important to drink plenty of fluids.



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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. So before you start taking the drug 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're taking bisphosphonates.

Some of the symptoms of osteonecrosis can include pain, swelling and redness of the gums, loose teeth or a feeling of numbness or heaviness in your jaw. Tell your cancer specialist and dentist straight away if you have any of these symptoms.

Additional information

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're admitted to hospital for a reason not related to the cancer, it is important to tell the doctors and nurses looking after you that you are having treatment with 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're at home.



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Useful sources of information

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

www.cancerresearch.org.uk

Contact us

Who to call if you are unwell:

Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists Tel: 01793 604340

Monday-Friday 9am-5pm

Breast Triage Line Tel: 01793 604340

Monday-Friday 9am-5pm

Chemotherapy Triage Line/ Day Therapy Centre, Tel: 01793 604348

Monday– Friday 9am-5:30pm

Out of Hours Dove Unit, Tel: 01793 604400

Chemotherapy Scheduling, Tel: 01793 607372

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

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