

Zoledronic acid for primary breast cancer



This booklet is about the drug zoledronic acid given to treat primary breast cancer. It explains what it is, who might be offered it and the side effects it can cause.



This information is by Breast Cancer Care.

We are the only specialist UK-wide charity that supports people affected by breast cancer. We've been supporting them, their family and friends and campaigning on their behalf since 1973.

Today, we continue to offer reliable information and personal support, over the phone and online, from nurses and people who've been there. We also offer local support across the UK.

From the moment you notice something isn't right, through to treatment and beyond, we're here to help you feel more in control.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit breastcancercare.org.uk



What is zoledronic acid?

Zoledronic acid is a drug that's given to reduce the risk of breast cancer spreading to the bones and other parts of the body.

It belongs to a group of drugs called bisphosphonates. These drugs slow down or prevent bone damage.

Who might be offered zoledronic acid?

Zoledronic acid is suitable for women who have been through the menopause (post-menopausal women). It can be used regardless of whether the menopause happened naturally or because of breast cancer treatment.

You may be offered zoledronic acid if you are post-menopausal and have had treatment for invasive breast cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.

It may also be considered if you have invasive breast cancer that has not spread to the lymph nodes.

You can read more about the lymph nodes in our booklet

Understanding your pathology results.

Other uses

Zoledronic acid is also prescribed:

- for people at risk of or who have osteoporosis
- as treatment for breast cancer that has spread to the bone

The information in this booklet is for women who are having it to reduce the risk of breast cancer spreading.

How is it given?

Zoledronic acid is given as a drip into a vein in your arm. The medical name for this is an intravenous infusion.

The infusion takes at least 15 minutes.

It's usually given every six months in the outpatient department of your hospital.

How long will I have zoledronic acid for?

You will usually be advised to have zoledronic acid for three to five years.

What are the side effects of zoledronic acid?

Like any drug zoledronic acid can cause side effects. Everyone reacts differently to drugs and some people have more side effects than others.

This booklet does not list all the possible side effects. If you're taking other drugs while having zoledronic acid, you may also have side effects from these and it's sometimes difficult to know which drug causes which side effects.

If you have any questions about side effects, whether they are listed here or not, talk to your treatment team.

Common side effects

Nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting (being sick)

This is usually mild. Anti-sickness drugs can be prescribed to relieve it.

Diarrhoea

This is usually mild. Anti-diarrhoea medication can be prescribed to help control this. Contact your treatment team if you have four or more episodes of diarrhoea within 24 hours. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid getting dehydrated.

Flu-like symptoms

Zoledronic acid can cause flu-like symptoms such as joint and muscle pain, fatigue, shivering and fever. These can last for a few days. Your treatment team can advise you about taking mild pain relief to help.

Red or sore eyes

Your eyes may be sore or red for a few days after your treatment. Your treatment team can prescribe eyedrops to relieve this.

Anaemia

Having too few red blood cells is called anaemia. If you feel particularly tired, breathless or dizzy let your treatment team know.

Less common side effects

Low calcium levels in the blood

Zoledronic acid can cause calcium levels in the blood to drop too low. This is called hypocalcaemia. You'll have regular blood tests to check the calcium levels. Early symptoms of hypocalcaemia include tingling around the mouth and lips and in the hands and feet. Let your treatment team know if you experience any of these. Your treatment team may recommend calcium and vitamin D supplements.

Allergic reaction

Zoledronic acid can cause an allergic reaction. If you become breathless or start to develop an itchy rash let your treatment team know straight away.

Bone, joint or muscle pain

Some people have bone, joint or muscle pain for a short time after having zoledronic acid. Let your treatment team know if you experience any of these symptoms.

Headaches

Let your treatment team know if you get headaches. They can advise you about what medicines to take.

Osteonecrosis

Zoledronic acid can cause some of the jaw bone to lose its blood supply and die. This is called osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ). It's an uncommon but serious side effect of zoledronic acid.

Symptoms include:

- lasting jaw pain
- loose teeth
- swelling, redness or ulcers on the gums

Let your treatment team and dentist know straight way if you have any of these symptoms.

ONJ is hard to treat so trying to prevent it is very important. Good dental hygiene can help reduce the risk of developing it. This includes brushing your teeth and flossing, making sure dentures fit well and having regular dental check-ups.

See your dentist for a check-up before starting treatment with zoledronic acid. Let them know you'll be starting treatment and speak to your treatment team if your dentist recommends any dental treatment before starting or while having zoledronic acid.

In rare cases osteonecrosis can affect the ear. If you have any ear pain, discharge from your ear or an ear infection while having zoledronic acid let your treatment team know.

Fracture

Although it's rare, zoledronic acid can cause the femur (the large bone in the upper leg) to fracture. It's not fully understood why this happens and it's more common in people who have been having zoledronic acid for a long time.

If you have lasting pain in your thigh, hip or groin, let your treatment team know.

Effects on the kidneys

Zoledronic acid can affect the way the kidneys work. You should have blood tests to monitor this.

Four ways to get support

We hope this information was helpful, but if you have questions, want to talk to someone or read more about breast cancer, here's how you can.



Speak to our nurses or trained experts. Call our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000** (Monday to Friday 9am–4pm and Saturday 9am–1pm). The Helpline can also put you in touch with someone who knows what it's like to have breast cancer.



Chat to other women who understand what you're going through in our friendly community, for support day and night. Look around, share, ask a question or support others at **forum.breastcancercare.org.uk**



Find trusted information you might need to understand your situation and take control of your diagnosis or order information booklets at **breastcancercare.org.uk**



See what support we have in your local area. We'll give you the chance to find out more about treatments and side effects as well as meet other people like you. Visit **breastcancercare.org.uk/in-your-area**

We're here for you: help us to be there for other people too

If you found this booklet helpful, please use this form to send us a donation. Our information resources and other services are only free because of support from people such as you.

Donate today and together we can ensure that everyone affected by breast cancer has someone to turn to.

Donate online

Donate using your debit or credit card breastcancercare.org.uk/donate

Donate by post

Please accept my donation of **£10/£20/my own choice of £**

I enclose a cheque/PO/CAF voucher made payable to **Breast Cancer Care**

Name _____

Address _____

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In addition, we'd love to keep you updated about our work and provide you with other opportunities to get involved with Breast Cancer Care. Please tell us how you would like to hear from us (by ticking these boxes you confirm you are 18 or over)

- I'd like to hear from you by email
- I'd like to hear from you by text message or SMS
- Please do not contact me by post
- Please do not contact me by telephone

We never give your information to other organisations to use for their own purposes. To change your preferences, or find out more information on how we use your data, please view our privacy policy at breastcancercare.org.uk or contact supporter services on 0345 092 0800.

Please return this form to Breast Cancer Care, Freepost RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG, Chester House, 1-3 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DE

Breast Cancer Care is a working name of Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now, a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558) and Scotland (SC045584).

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About this booklet

Zoledronic acid for primary breast cancer was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

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Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now are uniting to create one charity for everyone affected by breast cancer. Our aim is that by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live and be supported to live well.

From research to care, our new charity will have people affected by breast cancer at its heart – providing support for today and hope for the future. We'll find ways to prevent the disease, improve early diagnosis, develop new treatments, campaign for better care, and support people with the physical and emotional impact of breast cancer.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**

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