

ZOLEDRONIC ACID

What is Zoledronic acid and how does it work?

Also known as *Aclasta* or *Zometa*, Zoledronic acid is a bisphosphonate. These drugs increase bone strength (or bone density).

What is Zoledronic acid used for?

It is used to prevent or treat Osteoporosis (soft, brittle bones that break more easily).

It is also used to treat other conditions:

- Early stages of osteonecrosis
- High calcium levels in patients with cancer
- Paget's disease.

This drug works better when used with calcium, vitamin D and regular exercise.

How is Zoledronic acid taken?

It is given in a drip into a vein. This drip takes about 1 hour and is given once a year. Bisphosphonates may also be taken as a tablet (*Alendronate* or *Osteobon*) once a day or once a week. Many patients experience heartburn or forget to take these tablets – so the drip once a year suits most patients better. You do not need to take both the tablets and the drip!

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take Zoledronic acid?

- About all of your other medications (prescriptions or over-the-counter, natural products, vitamins) and health problems including low calcium levels or kidney problems.
- If you are allergic to any medications, any other drugs, foods, or other substances.
- If you are pregnant, planning to fall pregnant or breastfeeding. This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. Avoid getting pregnancy while you are taking it.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take Zoledronic acid?

- Take calcium and vitamin D as you have been told by your doctor
- Take a good care of your teeth. See a dentist often
- The bone density test (DEXA) will be repeated every 3 years to decide on the need for further treatment

What are some of the side effects of Zoledronic acid?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only minor side effects with Zoledronic acid.

Call your doctor or go to your local clinic / day hospital if any of these side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Feeling dizzy, tired or weak
- Flu-like symptoms – fevers, chills, headache
- Back, bone, joint, muscle, or neck pain
- Upset stomach or vomiting
- Stomach pain or heartburn
- Diarrhea or constipation

Very rare side-effects:

- Jawbone problems (osteonecrosis of the jaw)
- Broken bone in the thigh (atypical femur fracture)

→ If either of these rare side effects occur, inform the doctor who is looking after you that you are taking Zoledronic acid.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, talk to your doctor.

Contact us:

- Talk to your rheumatologist and rheumatology nurse at your next appointment or phone during clinic times (021) 404 5394 (Monday or Friday) or (021) 404 5313 (Thursday)
- The SA arthritis foundation (www.arthritis.org.za, 021 425 2344) is the charity leading the fight against arthritis, and offers online or telephone advice.