

# Bisphosphonates for Osteoporosis

Primary Care Medicines Team

## Introduction








This leaflet will provide you with the benefits and the risks of taking bisphosphonates.

## What are Bisphosphonates?

Bisphosphonates are medications used to treat conditions that affect your bones, for example osteoporosis. Bisphosphonates can help to strengthen bone and prevent it getting weaker. People who take a bisphosphonate are less likely to break (fracture) a bone. Bisphosphonates include:

- Alendronic acid
- Ibandronic acid
- Risedronate sodium

## How should they be taken?

	They should be taken first thing in the morning as soon as you get up.
	On an empty stomach, at least 30 minutes (1 hour for Ibandronic acid) before breakfast, food, drink (except plain tap water) or any other swallowed medication.
	Must be stood or sat upright. Being propped up on pillows is insufficient; must be sat up as if in an upright chair.
	The tablet must be swallowed whole with a full glass (around 200ml) of plain tap water.
	The tablet should not be sucked, chewed, crushed or broken.
	Sit or stand upright for 30 minutes (1 hour for Ibandronic acid) after taking the tablet. You may walk around during this time.
	No food, drink (except water) or other oral medication for 30 minutes to 2 hours after taking the tablet.

**The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.**

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

## Why is this important?

If bisphosphonates are not taken according to the dose instructions, there is a high risk of side effects and/or the medication not working.

Calcium tablets (e.g. Adcal D3 and Calcichew D3) are often prescribed alongside bisphosphonates to help them work more effectively, however these supplements can affect the absorption of bisphosphonates. Therefore, on the day that you take your bisphosphonate medication leave a period of at least 4 hours before taking your calcium supplement. Do not take them at the same time.

## What should I do if I get side effects from the medication?

It is important to tell your GP if you have any side effects as there are other drug treatments that you can be started on. Your doctor will refer you to see a rheumatologist who specialises in osteoporosis who will discuss alternative treatments with you.

## Should I stop taking Bisphosphonates?

Bisphosphonates are very helpful for preventing bone fractures in women and men with osteoporosis but not everyone agrees on how long bisphosphonates should be taken for. Most experts

agree that they need to be taken for a number of years to see the full effect.

There is evidence that bisphosphonates keep working on the bone for a few years after the medicine has been stopped. There is

also, evidence that taking them for longer than five years can do more harm than good. New research suggests that there are risks associated with staying on a bisphosphonate for long periods of time. These risks are rare, but include:

- Breaking a thigh bone
- Bone, joint, or muscle pain
- Problems with the health of your jawbone
- Most doctors recommend that a bisphosphonate should be taken for at least five years. After this period, they will carry out a review to see if you still need to take the medication. You may be told that you can stop taking a bisphosphonate. However, some people need to take a bisphosphonate for longer. Your doctor can advise you and discuss the options with you.

If you have been on a bisphosphonate for a long time, you may be nervous about stopping it. The choice to stop needs to be made by understanding the risks and benefits for you. If you have been on a bisphosphonate for longer than five years, talk to your doctor about whether stopping is the right choice for you.

## What happens if I stop taking my Bisphosphonate medication?

Your doctor will check your bone mineral density (BMD) every two to three years after stopping a bisphosphonate. If your tests show your bones are weakening faster than expected, you may be advised to restart treatment.

## Precautions

- If you have any 'new' thigh, hip or groin pains, report it to your doctor
- You must tell your dentist if you are taking a bisphosphonate. You will need to have regular dental check-ups. This is because there is a very small chance that you may get a condition affecting the jaw called 'osteonecrosis of the jaw'. This happens when the jaw bone does not receive enough blood and the bone starts to weaken. It is usually painful, but not always. In most people, this goes away after you have stopped taking your bisphosphonate

# You can do a lot to help prevent bone breaks or fractures

## Calcium and vitamin D

Calcium and vitamin D may come from food, supplements, or a combination of both. Be careful not to take more calcium and vitamin D than is recommended as too much can be harmful.

How much calcium should I be getting?	3-4 portions per day, with portion sizes of 200 - 300mg
How can I get that much calcium?	A daily intake of 1,000mg calcium can be obtained from eating all of these foods: 400ml milk (480mg) 125g plain yogurt (250mg) 30g hard cheese (225mg) and Two slices of wholemeal bread (60mg).

There are many other foods which are a good source of calcium.

Our body creates most of our vitamin D from direct sunlight on our skin. **A daily intake of between 10 - 20 micrograms vitamin D is recommended.**

The amount of time you need to spend in the sun for your skin to make enough vitamin D depends on a number of factors. These include:

- Your skin type (how dark your skin is or how easily you get sunburnt)
- The time of year
- The time of the day

Short daily periods (10-15 minutes) of sun exposure without sunscreen during the summer months (April to October) are enough for most people to make enough vitamin D.

## Complete weight-bearing exercises

**Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of a fracture and can help to keep your bones healthy.** Weight-bearing exercises are any exercise in which you are supporting your own body weight through your feet and legs (or hands and arms). Adults should be undertaking 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at least five days a week. Examples include walking, climbing stairs, yoga, Tai-Chi, dancing and golf.

## Lower your risk of falling

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if any of your medications make you feel light-headed or dizzy
- Have regular eye tests and wear glasses if you need them
- Remove rugs and other trip hazards from your home
- Be careful when going up and down stairs and always hold the banister
- Wear well-fitting footwear
- Limit or avoid alcohol

## Stop smoking

Visit NHS Smokefree for advice and support:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>

## Maintain a healthy weight

Visit the Live Well page on NHS Choices for advice and support: <https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx>

## Further information

You can find further information about osteoporosis and bisphosphates at:

- Patient.co.uk  
<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/bisphosphonates>
- Royal osteoporosis society  
<https://theros.org.uk>
- NHS Choices  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Summerhealth/Pages/vitamin-D-sunlight.aspx>



You can find out more about your rights in relation to treatment and drugs, plus other areas of your healthcare in the NHS Constitution: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england>

## English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

## Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

## Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

## Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

## Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。