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## **Osteoporosis Drug Therapy and Dental Treatment Bisphosphonates and Osteonecrosis**

Bisphosphonates (Actonel, Aredia, Boniva, Fosamax, Zometa, Ostac Skelid, Bonefos, Didronet are popular brand names) are a class of drugs administered either orally or IV to treat osteoporosis and certain types of bone tumors. It has become clear that osteonecrosis (bone death), a rare but serious and untreatable side effect, may occur with administration of these drugs followed by dental treatment that exposes bone. While it is possible for bisphosphonate-induced osteonecrosis of the jaw (BONJ) to occur spontaneously, it is more likely to occur following extractions, periodontal surgery, endodontic surgery, and implant treatment. When osteonecrosis from other causes occurs, the dead bone is surgically removed and treatment with antibiotics and hyperbaric oxygen (increased oxygen concentration) precipitates healing. However, once BONJ occurs, this treatment regimen is not likely to be successful. Ultimately, complete removal of the jaw may be the only remedy.

With time, better treatment options may become available but for now, a complete and thorough dental evaluation with definitive treatment (i.e. place necessary crowns, fill teeth, remove or treat periodontally involved teeth) is essential prior to starting bisphosphonate therapy.

After bisphosphonates are administered, the risk of BONJ is presumed and present evidence shows it may take up to 20 years for the drug to disappear. Because the side effect is so rare and has not been followed for long it is unknown at this time what the future will hold for treatment. For now, perfect oral hygiene, aggressive treatment of beginning dental disease, and regular checkups (possibly as often as quarterly) to prevent the need for any treatment that will expose bone is the standard of care.

Bisphosphonate drugs are excellent for their intended purpose and many other serious health effects would be evident without their use. Patients should be fully informed of all risks of therapy before deciding to embark on a course of treatment. If you have any questions, contact me or visit the American Dental Association website for more information. The PDF below is also viewable on this website.

<http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/topics/osteonecrosis.asp>

[http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/pubs/jada/reports/report\\_bisphosphonate.pdf](http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/pubs/jada/reports/report_bisphosphonate.pdf)