

Patient Education | Hematology & Oncology

Protecting Your Bones During Cancer Treatment

Some cancers and cancer treatments can make your bones weaker. This document describes ways your care team will help you keep them strong.

Medications that help your bones

Your doctor may give you medications called bisphosphonates or denosumab to protect your bones. These medications help slow down bone loss and lower the chance of broken bones. They may also help if cancer has spread to your bones or if your calcium levels are too high.

- › A **bisphosphonate** (for example, zoledronic acid) is usually given through an intravenous catheter (IV) every 4 weeks. An IV is a small tube placed into your vein that is used to give medications or fluids directly into your bloodstream. Common side effects of bisphosphonates include mild fever, tiredness, nausea or bone pain.
- › **Denosumab** (Xgeva®) is given as a shot under your skin every 4 weeks. Side effects can include rash, muscle pain, nausea or stomach changes.

Dental care

- › Both bisphosphonates and denosumab can put you at risk of a rare problem called osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ). ONJ happens when the jawbone does not get enough blood, causing the bone to slowly die and not heal like it should.
- › Before taking these medications:
 - Visit your dentist for a regular check-up and tell them you'll be taking these medications
 - It's safe to have a routine exam and cleaning

- Talk with your oncologist before having any dental work other than a basic cleaning
- › While taking these medications:
 - Brush your teeth at least twice daily.
 - Talk to your doctor before having any dental work done and inform your dentist that you are taking these medications.

Calcium and vitamin D

Your doctor may ask you to take calcium and vitamin D supplements. Take them exactly as directed.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- › Jaw pain, loose teeth or a sore in your mouth that does not heal
- › Swelling or infection in your mouth
- › Rash, hives or itching
- › Swelling of your face, lips or throat
- › Trouble breathing or swallowing
- › Chest pain or irregular heartbeat
- › Muscle cramps or spasms
- › Unusual bruising or bleeding

If you notice any of these symptoms or you have questions, call your care team.

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Developed by: NMG Clinical Education Team
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900595 (1/26) Protecting Your Bones During Cancer Treatment