

Dental advice for patients prescribed a bisphosphonate drug

Taking a bisphosphonate drug might affect the way some bones work and so there is a very small risk for developing a condition called bisphosphonate-related osteonecrosis of the jaw (BONJ).

What is the risk for developing BONJ?

The risk of developing BONJ is very low as this is an extremely rare condition. However, some other medical problems that you may have might slightly increase your risk. You should tell your dentist about any health problems that you have and all medicines that you are taking so that the dentist can assess your individual risk.

Should I stop taking the bisphosphonate drug?

No, continue to take your medication. The medical benefits of taking a bisphosphonate far outweigh the risks. Talk with your doctor and dentist if you have any questions.

What are the risks associated with dental treatment?

The risk is very low to nonexistent for most ordinary treatments. If you require treatment that affects bone (like a tooth extraction) and your dentist is concerned about how your medical history might increase your risk, then they may refer you to a specialist.

What are the risks associated with not having dental treatment?

You may be at increased risk of developing other health problems if a dental disease is not treated. Your dentist will be able to discuss alternative treatment options and the risks associated with them. You should also consult with your doctor about any health risks.

Can I decrease my risk of developing BONJ?

There are several things you should do to reduce the risk.

- Visit your dentist for regular dental check ups
- Ensure that you tell your dentist about all the medications you are taking
- Talk to your dentist about oral hygiene, because maintaining good oral hygiene is the best way to prevent oral diseases that may require dental surgery
- Reduce the frequency of sugary snacks and drinks
- Reduce the amount of alcohol you drink
- Do not smoke (call the NHS Stop Smoking Helpline on 0800 022 4332, or go to www.smokefree.nhs.uk).

Are there signs and symptoms I should look out for?

You should contact your dentist immediately if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- feeling of numbness, heaviness or other unusual sensations in your jaw
- pain in your jaw or a bad taste
- swelling of your jaw
- loose teeth
- exposed bone