

Bone Medication and Your Jaw

For patients taking, or about to start, Fosamax, Prolia, Reclast or a similar medicine.

The short version. These medicines can, rarely, leave a patch of jawbone that won't heal, most often after a tooth is taken out. It's called osteonecrosis of the jaw. For osteoporosis the risk is very low, and the medicine prevents far more broken bones than it causes jaw problems. At the stronger doses used for cancer, the risk is real and much higher. Either way, healthy teeth and gums are your best protection.

Which medicines?

- **Pills:** Fosamax (alendronate), Actonel (risedronate), Boniva (ibandronate)
- **Infusions:** Reclast (yearly, osteoporosis); Zometa (as often as monthly, cancer)
- **Shots:** Prolia (every 6 months, osteoporosis); Xgeva (monthly, cancer). Also sold as Jubbonti and Wyost.
- Evenity, a newer osteoporosis shot, carries a similar caution.

How likely is it?

Osteoporosis, pills or a yearly infusion **fewer than 5 in 10,000**

Osteoporosis, Prolia **up to about 3 in 1,000 after 10 years**

Cancer doses, Zometa or Xgeva **under 5 in 100**

If you read a scary number online, check which group it came from.

For osteoporosis, the medicine usually wins

Only about half of people who break a hip get back the independence they had. In the large trials, Reclast cut spine fractures by 70% and Prolia by 68%. Please don't turn your medicine down because of your teeth. Talk to us, and to your doctor.

Before you start

- We do a full exam with X-rays and look for gum disease, infection at the roots, and teeth we're unsure about.
- Whether to treat or remove a questionable tooth first, or keep it and watch it, is decided case by case, with you.
- **Starting a cancer dose?** See us before the first dose. Problem teeth are best handled first.

While you're taking it

- **Keep coming in.** Cleanings, fillings, crowns and root canals are safe and encouraged.
- **If a tooth needs to come out,** we mostly refer to an oral surgeon.
- **Pausing the medicine** around surgery is a decision for the surgeon and the doctor who prescribed it.
- **Dentures:** have sore spots checked, especially inside the lower denture.
- **Tell every dentist** about these medicines, including ones you took years ago. Some stay in the bone.

Never stop on your own. Stopping Prolia, or going well past the due date for a shot, can lead to quick bone loss and several spine fractures at once. Any change is your doctor's decision.

Call us if you notice: bone showing through the gum, a sore or socket that won't heal, jaw pain or swelling, numbness or a heavy feeling in the jaw or chin, a tooth getting loose for no clear reason, or a sore spot under your denture.

Bring this to your visit

Medicine: _____

Taking it for: Osteoporosis ☐ Cancer ☐ Other: _____

Started (or starting) on: _____

Date of last shot or infusion: _____

Prescribing doctor: _____

Questions? Call 702-734-0776

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Sources: American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, 2022 position paper on medication-related osteonecrosis of the jaw, and the clinical trials it cites. General information, not a substitute for an exam or for your physician's advice.



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