

## **Bisphosphonate – Intravenous (IV) infusion**

### ***What is it called?***

Zoledronic acid or Zoledronate

An infusion program is no longer available for the innovator brand (Aclasta®)

### ***What does it do?***

This medication strengthens the bones, prevents bone loss and reduces risk of fractures.

### ***How do I take it?***

This medication is given as an intravenous infusion, usually once a year. The infusion generally takes 15-30 minutes and is typically given at an infusion clinic. No hospital visit is needed.

### ***How long do I take it for?***

Major studies of this medications have lasted for 3 to 6 years (3 to 6 injections). How long you should take this medication will depend on your risk of breaking a bone, and this decision should be made jointly between you and your primary healthcare provider. In most cases, treatment will be recommended for 3 to 6 years, followed by 3 to 5 years off medications (sometimes called a “drug holiday”).

### ***Who should not take this medication?***

Some people with kidney problems should not take zoledronic acid, and it is important that your primary healthcare provider is aware of your kidney function before prescribing this medication.

### ***What side effects might I expect?***

About 10 - 20% of people will have a flu-like reaction to the first injection of this medication. The reaction usually occurs within 1 or 2 days of the injection. The type of reaction varies from person to person, but the most common symptoms are aching joints and muscles, and a low-grade fever. This reaction almost always resolves on its own within a few days.

In rare cases, people who are treated with zoledronic acid have developed jaw problems (also called ‘osteonecrosis of the jaw’) and fractures of the femur bone (also called ‘atypical femoral fractures’). These problems are very rare, and the risk of having one of these problems is estimated to be less than 1 in 10,000 for 5 years of treatment. The risk seems to increase the longer you are treated and seems to decrease after treatment is stopped. More information about atypical femoral fractures and osteonecrosis of the jaw is available below.

### ***What are the costs involved?***

The generic form of zoledronic acid costs ~ \$400 per injection. This medication is covered by some drug plans. It is only covered by Alberta Seniors Blue Cross in special circumstances.