PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET – ZOLEDRONIC ACID 5mg

Zolendronate (also known as zoledronic acid 5mg or Aclasta) is an intravenously administered “bisphosphonate”. Bisphosphonates work by preventing resorption of bone by inhibiting the function of bone-dissolving cells called osteoclasts. Bisphosphonates are commonly used in the treatment of osteoporosis and Paget’s disease and are also used for preventing some forms of cancer from spreading in bone. Zoledronic acid 5mg is given by an intravenous infusion (into a vein in the arm via a “drip) over about 15-30 minutes and can be given each 12-24 months as needed for treatment of osteoporosis. Treatment of Paget’s disease involves even less frequent infusions. Zoledronic acid increases the bone density in patients with osteoporosis, to about the same extent as other medicines such as alendronate (Fosamax), and is effective at reducing fracture rates, by 35-70%. It also reduces bone pain in Paget’s disease. It is licensed in New Zealand for treatment of osteoporosis and Paget’s disease. Other than flu-like symptoms after the first infusion, side effects from zoledronic acid 5mg are uncommon and are in general no different from placebo-treated patients in randomised trials. It should be remembered that major fractures can be very dangerous, so this should be balanced against the small risk of ill effects from treatments. Treatment is usually accompanied by some calcium tablets and/or vitamin D tablets given at the time of the infusion, to keep the blood calcium levels normal.

Side effects with zoledronic acid 5mg include:

1. About 30% of individuals may experience a flu-like feeling after their first treatment – headache, nausea, chills, sore muscles, , which usually lasts 24-72 hours, but which can occasionally go on for longer, sometimes with associated muscle or joint aching. This usually responds well to regular paracetamol or an anti-inflammatory such as Nurofen or diclofenac. The chance of this side-effect occurring after second or third zoledronic acid 5mg is much lower (about 3-4%).

2. Individuals with severe pre-existing kidney damage can sometimes experience deterioration in their kidney function after the administration of zoledronic acid 5mg. It is normal practice not to use zoledronic acid in people whose kidneys are not functioning well.

3. Very rarely, drugs in the bisphosphonate class can cause eye inflammation.

Unproven side effects with zoledronic acid 5mg include:

1. Osteonecrosis of the jaw (ulceration in tooth sockets or the gums, observed in a small number of cancer patients receiving high-dose treatment but not increased in those treated for osteoporosis or Paget’s disease). If you are planning significant dental work eg extractions, you should delay the infusion until this is completed. Tell your dentist if you are using Aclasta.
2. Atrial fibrillation (an abnormal heart rhythm noted by one group of overseas investigations but not seen in any other clinical trials).

3. Upper leg fractures (Reported in isolated cases by doctors in Singapore and the USA, but not clearly related to bisphosphonate therapy).

Prior to your infusion you should:

- Have a blood test for calcium level and renal function and check these are OK
- Be already taking vitamin D (cholecalciferol) or take two tabs of cholecalciferol 1 week prior to the infusion

On the day of your infusion:

- Drink and eat normally so you are well hydrated
- Do not take any fluid tablets (frusemide, inhibace plus, chlorthalidone) you are taking
- Do not take any anti-inflammatories (e.g., diclofenac, ibuprofen, Arcoxia, Celebrex, etc.).

After your infusion:

- Stop oral bisphosphonates such as Fosamax or Etidronate
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen will help control any sore muscles or flu like symptoms you may get.
- Take one calcium tablet twice a day for one week to help prevent low calcium. The symptoms of low calcium include rash, tingling and muscle twitching.

If you have any other questions about this medicine, or your bone condition, you should feel free to ask the doctors or nurses at Browns Bay Medical Centre. If you need to contact us after you have left the Clinic, you can phone 479 5422.