

Alendronate (Fosamax)

(Information from the Waikato Rheumatology Unit, Waikato Hospital, Hamilton)

Treatment with Fosamax

This information sheet should help you to understand the reasons for starting Fosamax treatment, and how it should be taken. It will probably not answer all of your questions, but should be a helpful starting point. If you have any questions please do not hesitate in contacting the Rheumatology nurse educator.

What is Fosamax?

It is a non-hormonal treatment for osteoporosis and Paget's disease. It is one of the bisphosphonates, which are phosphate salts that bind to the bone, and slows down the resorption of bone by the body. They reduce the risk of fractures by about half, partly by increasing bone density (thickness).

How do I take Fosamax?

- Fosamax may be ordered as a weekly or daily medication.
- Take with a large glass (not less than 200mls) of plain water (not mineral water, juice, tea or coffee).
- The tablet must be swallowed and not sucked or chewed.
- To reduce the risk of heartburn it is important to stay fully upright (sitting or standing) for at least 30 minutes after taking the tablet (it should not be taken at bedtime).
- Wait at least 30 minutes before taking food, drink, or other medications.
- Fosamax is only effective if taken on an empty stomach i.e. first thing in the morning as it can 'curdle' with other compounds.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

Don't take it later in the day. Miss the dose, and remember to take your medication the following morning.

How long does it take to start working?

The effects can be seen as soon as three month after starting the medication.

Do I need to take extra calcium or vitamins?

A good calcium intake is important, if you don't eat dairy produce your doctor may prescribe a calcium supplement. This supplement must not be taken until at least 30 minutes after taking Fosamax, and is best taken later in the day (with lunch or dinner). Your doctor may also prescribe vitamin D, if your dietary intake is not enough.

Are there any side effects?

As with all medications, there may be side effects. Care must be taken if you have a stomach problems or history of kidney problems. Most side effects are not serious and usually settle down after a few weeks. If any serious problems occur, we will stop the treatment.

Fosamax Side Effects

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Call Doctor or Rheumatology Nurse</u>
constipation, diarrhoea,	common (usually mild)	drink plenty of fluids
flatulence	common (usually mild)	yes - if severe or persistent
abdominal pain	rare	swallow pills, don't chew or dissolve in mouth
mouth ulcers	rare	if new, stop medication and contact doctor
heartburn	rare	stop medication - contact doctor
difficulty or pain swallowing	uncommon	no
muscle cramps or joint pain	rare	yes
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