

# HIGH RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS-RELATED FRACTURE: NEXT STEPS

## Key Points

- If you are at high risk of osteoporosis-related fractures, starting medication is your recommended course of action.
- Bisphosphonates are the first-line treatment in Canada. They are safe and will reduce your risk of fractures.
- For high-risk individuals, the benefits of taking bisphosphonates for 3 to 6 years far outweigh their potential harms.



## Overview

### • What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens bones, making them likely to break more easily. It affects almost 2.3 million Canadians. Osteoporosis-related fractures cause disability, lower quality of life, and even death.

### • Who is at high risk of osteoporosis-related fractures?

Some factors (previous fractures, family history, sex, age) raise your risk of osteoporosis-related fractures. Your healthcare provider may identify you as high risk based on these factors and other assessments.

### • If I'm at high risk, what are my options?

Medication is strongly recommended. Bisphosphonates are the first line, or main option, in Canada. They strengthen bones and slow down osteoporosis, reducing

your risk of a fracture in the future. If they are not available, or might not work with your other medications, denosumab is an alternative option.

### • Can I reduce the high risk with only lifestyle changes?

They may not enough on their own to reduce the risk of fractures. Exercise (functional, balance, resistance), nutrition (Calcium, vitamin D), and fall prevention plans should be a part of your treatment as they improve overall health. But for those at high risk, bisphosphonates remain strongly recommended.

### • How long do I need to take bisphosphonates?

Recommended treatment period is 3-6 years. After that, a temporary break or "drug holiday" may be considered if your bone health has stabilized or improved.

## If you're worried about side effects...

- Most side effects of bisphosphonates, like nausea or flu-like symptoms, are mild if felt at all.
- Serious side effects are extremely rare. They may include unusual thigh bone fractures, known as Atypical Femoral Fractures (AFF), or damage to the jawbone, known as Osteonecrosis of the Jaw (ONJ).
- Risk of AFF or ONJ is related to using bisphosphonates for longer periods than the recommended 3-6 years.

Over 5 years

Out of **100,000**  
on bisphosphonates



**2500**  
likely avoid a fracture



**25** may experience a  
serious side effect like  
AFF or ONJ

You're 100x more likely to avoid a fracture than to experience serious side effects on bisphosphonates. If you are at high risk of fractures, benefits of bisphosphonates far outweigh their potential harms.