

Q: I want to replace my tooth with a dental implant but my dentist doesn't recommend it because of the Fosomax I take for beginning osteoporosis. What's the big deal?

A: Osteoporosis is certainly worth addressing, as you will want to decrease your risk of bone fractures in your older years. Bisphosphonate medications are a group of drugs that help prevent bone loss (osteoclastic activity). Unfortunately, these drugs (including Fosomax, Actonel, Boniva, Reclast and the like) will put you at an increased **risk** of significant bone infection (Osteonecrosis of the jaws) (ONJ) following any "bony procedure". These high risk procedures include dental extractions, implant placement and even significant periodontal (gum disease) treatment.

Unfortunately the Bisphosphonate drugs have a long (10-year) half-life, which means it may take a very long time to get your bones back to "normal". For this reason alone, it is important to work with your physician *and* dentist to PLAN your osteoporosis treatment, with careful thought to your future dental needs. Not incidentally, we now have drugs (Evista, Forteo, and Miacalcin) approved for osteoporosis treatment that are at minimal risk for ONJ.

Given your personal history, it is advisable to have a blood test (CTx, a bone turnover marker) that will help your dentist assess your individual risk for ONJ. If the test shows you are at high risk, a drug "holiday" can be helpful in some patients. You can re-test your CTx after three months and monthly after that, to determine if or when your CTx climbs to a low-risk level.

The treatment of tooth replacement with a dental implant is still considered an "elective" procedure and should be treated as such, versus the infected or abscessed tooth that requires an extraction. Urgent, health-threatening conditions often need treatment even with increased ONJ risk. In that case you would be required to sign an informed consent medical release.

Dentistry is at the forefront in tying oral lesions to systemic illness and medications, with ONJ being a good example. Be sure to disclose your **entire** medical and drug history with your dentist so he or she can help you stay healthy for a lifetime.