

## REVIEW ARTICLE



# Bisphosphonates-osteonecrosis of jaw

Aesha<sup>1</sup>, Shahela Tanveer<sup>2</sup>, Sreeja<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Oral Pathology, Chettinad Dental College and Research Institute, Chennai, <sup>2</sup>Department of Oral Pathology, Sri Sai Dental College, Vikarabad, Hyderabad, <sup>3</sup>Department of Oral Pathology, Adhiparashakthi Dental College, Melmalvathur, Tamil Nadu

## Keywords

Bisphosphonates, clinical practice, mechanism, osteonecrosis of jaw

## Correspondence

Dr. Aesha, Department of Oral Pathology, Chettinad Dental College & Research Institute, Kelambakam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.  
E-mail: draesha24@gmail.com

Received 25 May 2015;

Accepted 02 June 2015

doi: 10.15713/ins.jodm.2

## Abstract

The recent recognition of bisphosphonate use came into use for pathological conditions which includes osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ) and other bone diseases. This article highlights about bisphosphonate and its effect and affect on ONJ. Jaw necrosis is a complication associated with conditions such as radiotherapy, severe fungal or bacterial infections, and sarcoidosis or after intravenous bisphosphonate therapy. The intravenous bisphosphonates - pamidronate (Aredia) and zoledronic acid (Zometa), are often used to treat cancer-related hypercalcemia, Paget's disease, symptoms from solid tumor bone metastasis and osteolytic lesions of multiple myeloma. Bisphosphonate related ONJ has been reported since 2003, in patients taking the drug, more often after dental procedures like extractions, minor surgeries, etc.

## Introduction

Osteonecrosis of jaw (ONJ) is a painful condition characterized by avascular necrosis of bone in oral cavity that is commonly associated with localized swelling and in some cases, a purulent discharge.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term “Phossy jaw” was coined to describe the maxillofacial necrosis that was seen in factory workers exposed to the white phosphorous used in matches.<sup>[1]</sup> Subsequently, the development of safety matches, which use amorphous red phosphorus, led to decline in “Phossy jaw” from 1850.<sup>[1]</sup> Since 2003, a condition that bears some similarities to “Phossy jaw” has been reported in patients with various cancers (reviewed by Woo *et al.*).<sup>[1]</sup> Bisphosphonate were synthesized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and initially used for the industrial purpose as antiscaling and anticorrosive agents in washing powders for the prevention of deposition of calcium carbonate. In 1960's Fleisch *et al.* mentioned about the inhibition of quality of bone resorption qualities associated with of bisphosphonates along with both structural and functional development led to formation which in turn inhibits bone resorption without causing harm in mineralization.<sup>[2]</sup>

They are the drugs that are widely used in the management of metastatic bone diseases and in the treatment of osteoporosis,<sup>[3]</sup> and in treating a wide variety of bone diseases (Pagets' disease, osteosclerosis, hypercalcemia owing to immobilization or malignancy, fibrous dysplasia).<sup>[2]</sup>

The American Society of Clinical Oncology has mentioned clearly that the patients taking bisphosphonates for multiple myeloma and breast cancer is must be continuous. Osteonecrosis shows the characteristic feature of the death of bone that is followed by many numbers of systemic and local factors along with the limited or compromised blood supply. Jaw bone necrosis is associated with both vascularization of maxilla or mandible. Usually present following head and neck radiotherapy and/or oral surgical interventions.<sup>[4]</sup> Bone necrosis of jaws appears as an exposure of avascular bone in the mandible, maxilla or both.<sup>[4]</sup>

The correlation between the use of bisphosphonates therapy in malignancy and the presence of jaw bone necrosis has been recently reported may be due to action of drug on bone vascularization and on osteoclastic activity.<sup>[4]</sup> Bisphosphonates medications have also become an essential part of treatment in patients with cancer and bone disease. Because of the evidence of clinical adverse effects that these medications have on maxilla and mandible investigations continue to be warranted to examine the effects on bone at cellular and molecular level.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Chemical Structure of Bisphosphonates

Bisphosphonates are synthetic analogs of pyrophosphates, an endogenous regulator of bone mineralization.<sup>[1]</sup> They consist of a pyrophosphate-carbon-phosphate (P-C-P) backbone and two covalently bonded groups attached to the central carbon atom,

known as  $R_1$  and  $R_2$ . The  $R_1$  chains have a hydroxyl group, which increases the affinity of bisphosphonates for bone hydroxyapatite.  $R_2$  group the primary feature is to distinguish different bisphosphonates. The non-aminobisphosphonates etidronate and clodronate have a -CH<sub>3</sub> and -Cl entity as their  $R_2$  chain. Newer generation bisphosphonates - zoledronic acid, pamidronate, ibandronate, and alendronate have nitrogen containing  $R_2$  chain.<sup>[1]</sup>

Bisphosphonates are mainly of two types, nitrogen containing and non-nitrogen containing with subgroups of either oral (or) intravenous administration. They are also divided into levels of potency: Low (alendronate, risedronate), medium (pamidronate), and high (zoledronate). Pamidronate and zoledronate are administered intravenously, and alendronate and risedronate are given orally.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Mechanism of action

They have such a high affinity for the hydroxyapatite in bone, they rapidly cleared from the systemic circulation and localize on bone mineral surfaces, particularly at sites of osteoclast activity.<sup>[1]</sup> When osteoclast is in their resorption phase, they are in a highly acidic microenvironment, which may facilitate the release of the bisphosphonate from the bone surface, giving rise to high local bisphosphonate concentrations.<sup>[6]</sup> The adverse effects depends on various factors such as whether or not they are an amino-bisphosphonate, the route of administration, and the dose of frequency of administration.<sup>[7]</sup> Bisphosphonates bind avidly to exposed bone mineral around resorbing osteoclast. Because they are not metabolized, these high concentrations are maintained within the bone for longer periods of time.<sup>[8]</sup> Bisphosphonates are stable analogs of pyrophosphate characterized by a P-C-P structure and two side chains attached to the carbon atom. The first chain controls the ability to bind to crystal in bone; the second chain determines the efficiency.<sup>[9]</sup> They are absorbed, stored, and excreted unchanged from the body. The plasma half-life is short (between 20 min and 2-3 h), while the bone half-life is very long ranging from several months to years.<sup>[4]</sup> They also inhibit various metalloproteinases (matrix metalloproteinases [MMPs]) (such as MMP-2,9, 12) involved in cancer growth and metastasis *in vitro*.<sup>[4]</sup> A decrease of osteoclastic activity reduces bone resorption and therefore are used for the treatment of multiple myeloma and controlling hypercalcemia in some malignancies and bone metastasis osteolysis.<sup>[10]</sup> The correct mechanism of bisphosphonate mediated osteoclast inhibition is not mentioned completely though, it has been established that these compounds affect bone turnover at various levels. At tissue level, it inhibits bone resorption and decrease bone turnover as assessed by biochemical markers.<sup>[5]</sup> On cellular levels, the bisphosphonates are clearly targeting the osteoclasts and may inhibit their function in several ways.<sup>[5]</sup> By inhibition of osteoclast recruitment, diminishing the osteoclast life span, and inhibition of osteoclastic activity at the bone surface.<sup>[5]</sup> At a molecular level, it has been postulated that bisphosphonates modulate osteoclast function by interacting with a cell surface receptor or an intracellular enzyme.<sup>[11]</sup> They have the ability to chelate calcium ions and

bind to hydroxy - apatite on bone surfaces undergoing. They are also known to affect expression of receptor activator of nuclear factor  $\kappa$ B, Ligand (RANKL), an osteoclast differentiation factor.<sup>[6]</sup> RANKL, which is necessary for differentiation and activation of osteoclast and their fusion into multinucleated cells.<sup>[12]</sup> The effects of RANKL are blocked by osteoprotegerin, which acts as a receptor antagonist for RANKL and prevents bone resorption.

### Bisphosphonate Associated ONJ (BONJ)

BONJ can be defined as the unexpected development of necrosis in the oral cavity of a patient who has received bisphosphonates but not radiotherapy to the head and neck.<sup>[1]</sup> The first report of this painful and vascular necrosis of the bone in the mandible and maxilla in patients receiving the amino-bisphosphonates pamidronate or zoledronic acid was published by Marx *et al.* in 2003.<sup>[13]</sup>

### Clinical presentation

The typical clinical presentation of BONJ has been concisely, described by Migliorati *et al.*<sup>[14]</sup> Clinically, BONJ presents as an area of exposed bone (alveolar) that occurs spontaneously or become clear followed by invasive surgical intervention such as extraction of tooth, dental, implant placement or even apicectomy.<sup>[2]</sup> The three most common sites are (1) non-healing extraction sites (2) injured tori a developmental defect (palatal and/or mandibular) (3) exposed part of the mylohyoid ridge.

A cumulative incidence for bisphosphonates induced necrosis was noted of about 0.8-12%. An uncommon disease, which is less aggressive and is more responsive to treatment, is the oral route of administration than intravenous. The American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons classified the risk factors into three types: Drug-related - depending on its potency and duration. Furthermore, include local factors and systemic factors which include cancer diagnosis, bone disorders like osteoporosis.<sup>[2]</sup> The nitrogen - containing bisphosphonates have been described as main culprits,<sup>[10]</sup> Zervas *et al.* and Durie *et al.* showed the similar results having a risk factor of developing osteonecrosis, which is 10 times more in zoledronic acid compared to that with pamidronate.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Diagnosis of Bisphosphonates Induced ONJs

The clinical picture does not show the real extent of BONJ. For early diagnosis of the disease the accurate estimation of its extent, imaging is important. However, conventional radiographic methods-dental panoramic radiographs, are of limited use.<sup>[9]</sup> Computerized tomography (CT) scans and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have been shown to be better choices for the estimation of the extent of BONJ. The role of bone imaging with Tc-99m diphosphonates and found to be more sensitive than CT and MRI. Recent studies have demonstrated that F-18 fluoride is more accurate than 99m-Tc diphosphonates single-photon emission CT for identifying both benign and malignant lesions.<sup>[9]</sup> Serum bone markers and other relevant endocrine assays were C-telopeptide, N-telopeptide,

bone-specific alkaline phosphates, osteocalcin, intact parathyroid hormone, T3, T4, thyroid-stimulating hormone, Vitamin D25-hydroxy. They are signs of bone turnover process and may use to determine whether or not a patient may have bone disease and because the jaws have a greater blood supply than the other bones, and a high turnover of bone rate related to their daily activity, bisphosphonates are highly concentrated in jaws.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Management and prevention

Before initiating bisphosphonate therapy in cancer patients, all patients should undergo routine clinical dental examination and panoramic jaw radiography to detect potential periodontal and dental infection. The diagnostic value of bone scans by radioactive technetium in this situation are encouraging since <sup>99</sup>Tc (m) -MDP 3 - phase bone scan was reported as the most sensitive tool for detecting osteonecrosis at an early stage. Patients must be educated regarding dental and oral hygiene, and they should have regular (every 3-4 months) scheduled oral assessments.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Management recommendations

---

#### Prophylactic recommendation

Routine oral examination and care to stabilize oral disease and prevent oral trauma/irritation before administering bisphosphonate therapy to the patient

Management of acute symptoms: Pain and infections

Oral hygiene (brushing and flossing)

Topical antibiotics (e.g., chlorhexidine, tetracycline)

Systemic antibiotics active against common oral/dental bacterial infections

Pain medications

Management of exposed bone

Early: Conservative removal of exposed bone, primary closure when possible

Later: Conservative protection of site, bone recontouring, prevention of infection

Protective: Covering of symptomatic (e.g., vinyl guards, stents)

---

### Conclusion

The emergence of ONJ as a possible adverse effect of long-term, high-dose bisphosphonate therapy has raised serious concerns within the medical and dental communities. The direct relationship with bisphosphonates must undergo research into this phenomenon is prioritized to characterize further risk factors and inciting factors, and develop and test effective treatment strategies. In particular, it will be important to determine whether ONJ is predominantly observed in connection with the use of amino-bisphosphonates. In the meantime, use of bisphosphonates should be carefully planned in patients with risk for osteoradionecrosis of jaw and preventive measures must be carried out to avoid any further complications.

### References

1. Diel IJ, Fogelman I, Al-Nawas B, Hoffmeister B, Migliorati C, Gligorov J, *et al.* Pathophysiology, risk factors and management of bisphosphonate-associated osteonecrosis of the jaw: Is there a diverse relationship of amino- and non-aminobisphosphonates? *Crit Rev Oncol Hematol* 2007;64:198-207.
2. Siddiqi A, Payne AG, Zafar S. Bisphosphonate-induced osteonecrosis of the jaw: A medical enigma? *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2009;108:e1-8.
3. Alons K, Kuijpers SC, de Jong E, van Merkesteyn JP. Treating low – and medium-potency bisphosphonate-related osteonecrosis of the jaws with a protocol for the treatment of chronic suppurative osteomyelitis: Report of 7 cases. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2009;107:e1-7.
4. Merigo E, Manfredi M, Meleti M, Corradi D, Vescovi P. Jaw bone necrosis without previous dental extractions associated with the use of bisphosphonates (pamidronate and zoledronate): A four-case report. *J Oral Pathol Med* 2005;34:613-7.
5. Ruggiero SL, Mehrotra B, Rosenberg TJ, Engroff SL. Osteonecrosis of the jaws associated with the use of bisphosphonates: A review of 63 cases. *J Oral Maxillofac Surg* 2004;62:527-34.
6. Naidu A, Dechow PC, Spears R, Wright JM, Kessler HP, Opperman LA. The effects of bisphosphonates on osteoblasts *in vitro*. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2008;106:5-13.
7. Lehrer S, Montazem A, Ramanathan L, Pessin-Minsley M, Pfail J, Stock RG, *et al.* Normal serum bone markers in bisphosphonate-induced osteonecrosis of the jaws. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2008;106:389-91.
8. Cavanna L, Bertè R, Arcari A, Mordenti P, Pagani R, Vallisa D. Osteonecrosis of the jaw. A newly emerging site-specific osseous pathology in patients with cancer treated with bisphosphonates. Report of five cases and review of the literature. *Eur J Intern Med* 2007;18:417-22.
9. Wilde F, Steinhoff K, Frerich B, Schulz T, Winter K, Hemprich A, *et al.* Positron-emission tomography imaging in the diagnosis of bisphosphonate-related osteonecrosis of the jaw. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2009;107:412-9.
10. Migliorati CA, Schubert MM, Peterson DE, Seneda LM. Bisphosphonate-associated osteonecrosis of mandibular and maxillary bone: An emerging oral complication of supportive cancer therapy. *Cancer* 2005;104:83-93.
11. Boonyapakorn T, Schirmer I, Reichart PA, Sturm I, Massenkeil G. Bisphosphonate-induced osteonecrosis of the jaws: Prospective study of 80 patients with multiple myeloma and other malignancies. *Oral Oncol* 2008;44:857-69.
12. Carmagnola D, Celestino S, Abati S. Dental and periodontal history of oncologic patients on parenteral bisphosphonates with or without osteonecrosis of the jaws: A pilot study. *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol Endod* 2008;106:e10-5.
13. Marx R, Sawatari Y, Fortin M. Bisphosphonate-Induced Exposed Bone (Osteonecrosis/Osteopetrosis) of the Jaws: Risk Factors, Recognition, Prevention, and Treatment. *Journal of oral and maxillofacial surgery* 2005;63:1567-75.
14. Migliorati C, Siegel MA, Elting LS. Bisphosphonate –associated osteonecrosis: A long term complication of bisphosphonate treatment. *The Lancet Oncology* 2006;6:508-14.

<p><b>How to cite this article:</b> Tanveer S, Aesha, Sreeja. Bisphosphonates-osteonecrosis of jaw. <i>J Oral Dis Markers</i> 2017;1:2-4.</p>
---