



Osteoporosis drugs

When choosing which medicines to include on our drug list, we look at the strongest research. And we look at how the drugs work for members like you. That's because it's important for osteoporosis drugs to help prevent broken bones - and help you live a normal, healthy life.

Osteoporosis makes bones weak

Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones become weak and easy to break. The most common places for bones to break on the body are the wrist, spine and hips. These injuries are painful and can worsen your quality of life. They sometimes require surgery and it can take a long time to recover.

Medicine can help prevent broken bones

If you have osteoporosis, it's important to take drugs that help stop bone loss. Stronger bones are less likely to break. The most common type of osteoporosis drugs helps prevent breaks. These drugs are called bisphosphonates.

Your plan offers many drugs that help prevent bone loss

Here's a step-by-step look at how bisphosphonates are chosen for the drug list – a list of prescription drugs included in your plan.

Step 1: Clinical review and rating

First, doctors and pharmacists – who are not our employees – look at the best quality scientific research on bisphosphonates. They use a detailed report prepared by our pharmacists to review the strongest clinical studies. This report starts with information from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about each drug's approved uses, dosages and safety. It also shows how well drugs work and how safe they are.

The doctors and pharmacists also look at information that shows how these drugs work in real life, not just in trials. Finally, they look at all the data to rate which drugs will work the best for members like you.



Here's what the research says about bisphosphonates:

- All of these drugs help prevent spine, hip, and other bone fractures except Boniva. Boniva only helps prevent spine fractures. For this reason, other osteoporosis drugs should probably be tried first before Boniva and generic Boniva (ibandronate).
- Alendronate, Fosamax and Actonel are approved to treat many types of osteoporosis in men and women.
- Alendronate is the generic version of the brand-name drug Fosamax. It works just as well as Fosamax.
- Atelvia works just as well as Actonel, but it is released slowly in your body. It can be taken in the morning with breakfast.
- All the drugs have similar side effects. They include muscle or joint aches, upset stomach and heartburn. When taking these types of drugs, it's also a good idea to make sure you get the right amount of calcium and vitamin D.

Some popular drug names are in the table below.
 A ✓ in this table means the drug is proven to work well.

Drug name	Helps prevent broken hips and other bones	Helps prevent broken spines
Actonel	✓	✓
alendronate and Fosamax	✓	✓
Atelvia	✓	✓
ibandronate and Boniva		✓
zoledronic acid and Reclast	✓	✓

Bisphosphonates differ in how often they are taken. This table shows the differences.

Drug name	Once a week	Once a month	Once a year
Actonel	✓	✓	
alendronate and Fosamax	✓		
Atelvia	✓		
ibandronate and Boniva		✓	
zoledronic acid and Reclast*			✓

* Zoledronic acid and Reclast is injected into the skin using an intravenous (IV) infusion given by a nurse or doctor.

Step 2: Cost review

Next, we use the drug ratings from the first step. We look at how often doctors choose the best-rated drugs for patients. Then, we review drug costs to make sure the best medicines are affordable for you. We consider drug costs only after we've looked at how well the drugs work.

Step 3: Choosing drugs

Next, we choose bisphosphonates for the drug list that are safe, work well and offer the best value. We decided these drugs should be added to the drug list:

Lower cost (generics)	Medium cost	Higher cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● alendronate tablets and oral solution (generic Fosamax) ● ibandronate tablets (generic Boniva) ● zoledronic acid injection (generic Reclast) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actonel tablets ● Fosamax Plus D tablets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Atelvia tablets ● Binosto* tablets ● Boniva tablets ● Fosamax tablets ● Reclast injection ● Boniva injection

*Effervescent tablet for oral solution

Check out these websites to learn more

Effective Health Care Program: Effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov

This website is from a government group called the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. It has a thorough guide on osteoporosis drugs.

National Osteoporosis Foundation: Nof.org

This nonprofit group's website has a wealth of information on all types of osteoporosis.

North American Menopause Society: Menopause.org

This website has good information for women with osteoporosis after menopause.



