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Are you aware of the drug's side effects

You are about to take a pill, stop a minute and read the package label and insert or the pharmacy information sheet that comes with the drug. Scrutinize the reported side effects. No matter how valuable the medication is for you, it almost always has a downside.

It is up to you and your doctor to decide whether the good the drug can do is outweighed by its possible side effects and whether there is another drug that can help you as much with fewer problems. It is critical for you the patient to be fully aware of the problems that can occur while taking the medication.

For example, two weeks ago the American Association of Endodontists issued a statement warning those who take bisphosphonates that they may be at risk for a painful condition that leads to the breakdown of the jaw bone: osteonecrosis. Bisphosphonates are a class of drug used to treat cancer and debilitating bone diseases such as osteoporosis and Paget's disease. Many of us are familiar with the brand names for these drugs: Fosamax, Boniva, Actonel, Zometa, among them.

More than 30 million Americans are taking these drugs, and the endodontists who specialize in root canal procedures say more patients need to be aware of the link between these drugs and the painful condition they may produce. Patients also need to tell their dental professionals about taking these drugs since, the AAE said, the condition may be triggered by tooth extractions and other dental surgical procedures, as well as occurring spontaneously. Be alert for possible symptoms, which can include: irregular sore with exposed jaw bone, pain or swelling in the infected jaw, Infection (possibly with pus,) and altered sensation such as numbness or heavy feelings in the jaw. Not everyone will develop osteonecrosis, of course, and drug makers say the possibilities of the condition affecting patients is small.

Those taking increased doses, especially intravenously, are most likely at risk. Still, the endodontists warn that "until further information becomes available, the AAE recommends that all patients taking bisphosphonates be considered at some risk." While bisphosphonates support the buildup of bone in areas weakened by disease, as a side effect of treatment, patients may experience the opposite in their lower and upper jawbones. " Even though the risk of developing this condition is said to be small, patients need to know about it. And to be responsible for knowing all the side effects of any drug they are taking.