

Osteoporosis prevention

Osteoporosis is a disease that **weakens** bone structure. What many of us do not know, however, is that many older patients live a very long time with fractures that are not treated.

Postmenopausal women are much more likely to suffer a fracture than men, and the older the individual, the higher the risk. The most common injury is **femoral neck fracture**, followed by vertebral and **wrist** fractures. Although there are various causes, loss of **bone mineral density** (BMD) is the single major factor in osteoporosis, and is caused by an imbalance between the osteoblasts, cells that form bone tissue, and osteoclasts, cells that destroy bone tissue. The medication of choice for treating loss of BMD are bisphosphonates.

Female pharmacy customer: Hello, do you speak English?

PTA: Hello, yes I do. How may I help you?

I have a **prescription** for something called ...

I see here that your doctor has prescribed an **alendronic acid bisphosphonate**. It's also known as **alendronate**.

Acid! Is it sour?

Don't be afraid! It's important to closely follow the instructions on the package insert. You should stay upright 30 minutes to one hour after taking it. Due to its acidity, it can cause inflammation of the oesophagus, and a common side effect is an upset stomach.

How often should I take it?

Once a week, on the same day. I also have one of those green prescriptions. Are they special?

It just means that they are private, and that your doctor has recommended an over-the-counter product.

Can I take it with the ...?

Bisphosphonate. No, not at the same time, because of the possibility of unwanted drug in-

teraction between calcium, vitamin D and the bisphosphonate. Are you taking any other medication?

I have only ever taken the **occasional** painkiller, and now this! I have no idea how I am going to manage!

We have pill boxes with the days of the week on them, so that you can be sure if you have taken the medication or not.

That is a good idea! If I can't take them together, what should I do?

You have to take the alendronate with a large glass of tap water on an empty stomach.

Why not mineral water? Because of interactives with the minerals. What are the tablets for?

They inhibit the formation of osteoclasts, the cells that destroy bones. Did your doctor carry out tests to check for osteoporosis or hypocalcaemia?

Oh yes, she did lots of tests before she discovered that the cause of my back pain was osteoporosis.

I see. You should take the calcium/vitamin D3 combination tablet daily. On the day that you take the alendronate, wait until about an hour after breakfast before taking the other tablet.

I don't know how I'll be able to remember all the information!

If you would like to wait a moment, I'll print out the English instructions for taking alendronic acid medication.

Thank you, that is very kind of you! ■

*Catherine Croghan,
Lecturer in English and native speaker*

VOCABULARY

Osteoporosis prevention	Osteoporose-Vorsorge
weakens	schwächt ab
femoral neck fracture	Oberschenkelhalsbruch
wrist	Handgelenk
bone mineral density	Knochenmineraldichte
prescription	Arztrezept, Verordnung
alendronic acid	Alendronsäure
package insert	Beipackzettel
upright	aufrecht
inflammation	Entzündung
upset stomach	Magenprobleme
occasional	gelegentlich
tap water	Leitungswasser

