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## **Zometa Improves Disease-Free Survival In Breast Cancer**

**By JACOB GOLDSTEIN**

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Zometa, a Novartis AG bone drug, significantly reduces the risk that breast cancer will return in certain patients, researchers said.

The drug is approved to help cancer patients maintain bone strength, but hasn't previously been shown to reduce the risk of cancer recurrence.

The study, presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology conference, enrolled just over 1,800 pre-menopausal women with early stage, hormone-sensitive breast cancer. Half received hormone treatments alone, and the other half received hormone treatment combined with Zometa.

All of the women did pretty well: Overall, more than 90% of the patients were disease-free five years after their initial treatment. But those who received Zometa did even better than those who did not. Among women who received Zometa, 6% died or had cancer recurrence; among those who did not receive the drug, 9% died or had a recurrence.

The benefit was not limited to reducing spread of cancer to the bones: Those who received Zometa were also less likely to have cancer return in the same breast, or in the opposite breast.

Lab studies have suggested the drug may inhibit tumor cell growth and the growth of new blood vessels, and may strengthen the immune system -- though it's not entirely clear why the drug showed the effect it did.

"It's still great, even if we don't know the exact benefit," Michael Gnant of the Medical University of Vienna, the lead author, said at a press conference this morning.

Zometa is part of a class of bone drugs called bisphosphonates, and costs about \$850 per dose. It was given by injection every six months for three years, and side effects weren't a major problem, Dr. Gnant said. Osteonecrosis of the jaw, a serious problem

that has been connected to bisphosphonates, did not occur in any women in the study.

Eric Winer, a Harvard breast cancer doctor who moderated the press conference, called the results of previous studies of bisphosphonates in reducing the risk of cancer recurrence "mixed."

"I would be extremely uncomfortable generalizing (this study) to all women with breast cancer," he said. Data on using Zometa in post-menopausal women should be forthcoming in the next year or two.