



Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Advice about Antifungals

Information for patients and carers



## What are fungi?

A fungus is an organism that is neither an animal nor a plant. Examples are moulds, yeasts, and mushrooms. The plural for fungus is fungi. Fungi may grow in many different environments, including in the human body, and are generally harmless.

## What diseases do fungi cause?

Some fungi may infect people and can cause disease. This could be because a fungus normally found in low numbers in the human body becomes overgrown or because a fungus from the environment has made its way into the body and the immune system cannot fight it.

### Examples of fungal infections are:

- Mouth and vaginal yeast infections (thrush)
- Athlete's foot
- Fungal nail infections
- Ringworm

Some fungal infections are more serious. You are more at risk of getting one of these infections if you have a weakened immune system – for example, if you are taking medicines to suppress your immune system. Examples of serious fungal infections include:

- fungal pneumonia, for example, aspergillosis (a serious fungal infection which can affect the lungs)
- fungal brain infection, for example, mucormycosis
- fungal blood infection, for example, candidaemia

## **How are fungal infections treated?**

Fungal infections are treated with antifungals. Antifungals work by stopping the growth of a fungus or by killing the fungus.

## **Frequently used antifungals and how to take them**

Here are some examples of antifungals which are taken by mouth and how to take them.

### **Fluconazole**

- Fluconazole capsules– swallow whole with water, can be taken with or without food.
- Fluconazole liquid - can be taken with or without food.

### **Posaconazole**

- Posaconazole tablet - swallow whole with water, can be taken with or without food.
- Posaconazole liquid – take with or after food.
- Tablet and liquid forms are not the same and therefore a change in dose is needed if a change in form is made.

### **Voriconazole**

- Voriconazole tablet - take at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after a meal, swallow whole with water.
- Voriconazole suspension – take at least one hour before or two hours after a meal.

### **Itraconazole capsule**

- Itraconazole capsule – take straight after a meal, swallow whole with an acidic drink e.g. orange juice or cola.
- Itraconazole liquid – take when stomach is empty at least 1 hour before or 2 hours after food.

## **Isavuconazole**

- Isavuconazole capsule - swallow whole with water, with or without food.

## **Terbinafine**

- Swallow whole with a glass of water, with or without food.

## **Here is an example of an antifungal which is given by injection:**

- Liposomal Amphotericin B (Ambisome®) – if you need to have this at home a nurse will visit you to do this.

## **Reactions with other medicines**

Antifungals can react with a lot of other medicines. Always inform your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medications. Read the antifungal patient information leaflet given to you or ask your pharmacist for advice. Before taking your antifungal, tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any allergies
- have any liver or kidney problems
- take any other medicines, including vitamins, herbal remedies, and medicines you buy over the counter from a pharmacy or health food shop

Fluconazole and itraconazole, when taken with alcohol, can increase the risk of liver injury.

Your doctor may change the dose of some of your other medications while you are taking your antifungal. This should return to normal when the course of antifungal has finished.

## **Length of antifungal course**

Most antifungals should be taken for a short period of time to treat a fungal infection. Your doctor will tell you how long to take your antifungal. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure of how long to take it for.

You may have been given an antifungal for a long time to prevent a fungal infection, for example, whilst your immune system is weakened.

## **What if a dose is missed?**

If you forget to take a dose of your antifungals, take that dose as soon as you remember and then continue to take your course of antifungals as normal.

But if it's almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Do not take a double dose to make up for a missed one.

## **Common side effects**

Like most medications, antifungals may have side-effects. Common side-effects may include:

- dizziness
- altered taste
- headache
- changes in vision
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- nausea
- skin rash

Antifungals can affect your liver, so if any of the following occur then contact your hospital doctor, general practitioner or pharmacist; dark urine, yellow skin or eyes, abdominal pain or loss of appetite.

Voriconazole can make your skin sensitive to sunlight and artificial sources of light, such as sun lamps. You should avoid exposure to the sun and use sunscreen with high sun protection factor.

Posaconazole and Isavuconazole can make you sleepy. If this happens do not drive or use tools or machines.

Always read the specific patient information leaflet given to you with your antifungal for more information about possible side-effects.

If you suffer from side-effects caused by your antifungal, or if the symptoms of the side-effects persist, contact your doctor.

## **Allergic reactions and what to do**

It is rare to have an allergic reaction to antifungals. If you think that you are having an allergic reaction after taking an antifungal such as swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing, stop taking the medication and contact your GP or telephone 111 immediately for advice.

Always tell your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you have had an allergic reaction to an antifungal and remind them of your allergy before you receive any antifungals.

**You should call 999 immediately if you have difficulty breathing, feel dizzy or collapse.**

## **Antifungal use at OUH**

At Oxford University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, we have guidelines for antifungal prescribing for the treatment of most common infections.

OUH is committed to effective and safe prescribing of antifungals. Antifungals are used only where necessary and for the shortest period of time, where clinically appropriate. If you have any further questions regarding your antifungal treatment, please contact your doctor or pharmacist.

## **Further information**

If you have any questions about your antifungal, please ring the:

### **Patient Medicines Helpline**

Telephone: **01965 228 906**

This service is available Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

The helpline will not be able to answer questions about your illness in general or other people's medications without their permission.

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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