



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Advice About Antibiotics

**Information for
patients and carers**



This leaflet has been written to provide you (or your carer) with important information about how to use antibiotics safely and effectively.

Consent

The staff will ask you for your permission to give you antibiotics. The staff will explain the risks, benefits, and alternatives, if there are any, before they ask for your consent. Remember that it is your choice whether you give your consent or not. If you have any doubts or would like more information before you make a decision, please ask staff for more information. The staff will do everything they can to help you.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines used to **treat** or **prevent** infections caused by **bacteria**. Antibiotics are sometimes called antibacterials or antimicrobials and work by killing bacteria or preventing their growth.

Antibiotics can be taken by mouth as liquids, tablets, or capsules, or they can be given by injection.

Antibiotics can also be available as creams, ointments, lotions or drops to apply to the skin, eyes or ears to treat certain infection.

Antibiotics do not work against the viruses that cause common colds, flu, coughs and sore throats. Most viral infections will clear up without treatment.

Treating infection

You will only be prescribed antibiotics when you need them. The dose and duration of your treatment will depend on the type of infection, how severe it is and the antibiotic used.

You will receive a 'course' of antibiotics. This means taking antibiotics for a set period of time, or until the infection has completely gone.

The antibiotics may not work if you do not take them as prescribed. It may also cause the bacteria to become resistant (immune) to that antibiotic. This means that the antibiotic will not work for that bacteria in the future. See page 6 for further information.

Preventing infection

You may be given antibiotics to prevent an infection if you are having an operation. This is known as surgical prophylaxis and is commonly given both before and after surgery.

If your immune system is weakened, you may be given long-term antibiotics to protect you from infection (e.g. after a splenectomy).

Starting antibiotics

Before taking your antibiotics, tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any history of medication allergies or other allergies (i.e. lactose intolerance, allergy to nuts). Give them details of your allergy and reactions
- have any liver or kidney problems
- are pregnant or breastfeeding.

When taking antibiotics

- always take antibiotics as instructed
- if you have trouble remembering to take your antibiotics, set an alarm or ask family or friends to remind you
- if you are struggling to take your antibiotics, speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Some antibiotics may interact with alcohol, food or other medications. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about any regular or 'as required' medications that you take including herbal remedies, vitamins and medicines you buy over the counter.

Try and space the doses throughout the day. If, for instance, you have been directed to take 'one capsule three times a day'. This practically means every 8 hours more or less.

Store antibiotics out of the reach of children. Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets. Do not keep left-over antibiotics. Any left-over antibiotics should be returned to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

Common side effects

Allergic reactions are different to side effects. Like most medications, antibiotics may have side effects which may include:

- diarrhoea
- upset stomach
- nausea or vomiting
- thrush. Thrush tends to grow in warm, moist conditions and develops if the balance of bacteria changes.

A list of side effects associated with an antibiotic agent is provided within the patient information leaflet along with the antibiotic. Get in touch if you have any concerns about a potential side effect. You can talk to a pharmacist, GP or telephone 111 for advice.

Suspected side effects to medicines should be reported via the Yellow Card reporting site by your carer, doctor, pharmacist or yourself.

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

Allergic reactions to antibiotics

Many people who think they are allergic to antibiotics are in fact experiencing the side effects of the medicine, which are not related to an allergic reaction.

A common sign of an allergic reaction is a skin rash. More serious allergic reactions include swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing. This is called an anaphylactic reaction and it can be serious or even life threatening.

If you have difficulty breathing, feel dizzy or collapse, you or someone with you should call 999 immediately.

Stop taking the antibiotic if you think you are having an allergic reaction after taking it. Seek advice from a pharmacist, GP or telephone 111.

Always remind your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have had an allergic reaction to an antibiotic, and remind them of your allergy before you start taking them.

Antibiotic resistance

Some types of bacteria have become resistant to the effects of standard antibiotic treatments. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are more difficult to treat and have a higher risk of complications.

The person prescribing your treatment may carry out some tests to check whether you have an infection caused by resistant bacteria. They will then review the results of these tests and discuss suitable treatments with you. This may mean changing the type of antibiotic you are prescribed.

When to ask for help

After completing your antibiotic course, escalate any concerns to your doctor especially if:

- 1) you get a high temperature
- 2) you keep on feeling unwell or your symptoms persist/come back.

Antibiotic use at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH)

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has guidelines for antibiotic prescribing. They cover the treatment of most common infections.

We are committed to effective and safe prescribing of antibiotics. Antibiotics are used only where necessary and for the shortest period of time, where appropriate. If you have any further questions about your antibiotic treatment, please contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Further information

If you have any questions about your antibiotic, please ring the **Patient Medicines Helpline:**

Telephone: **01865 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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