

Antibiotics

Patient information

The antibiotic(s) I am taking is/are:

(A member of staff should complete this for you)

What you need to know about antibiotics



Common side-effects include: mild stomach upsets, diarrhoea, and nausea.

You should tell your doctor if you have any of the following side-effects:

- Severe watery diarrhoea and abdominal cramps (possible signs of a serious bacterial infection of the gut - *Clostridium difficile* infection)
- Shortness of breath, itching, rash, swelling of lips/face/tongue, fainting (signs of an allergic reaction)
- Vaginal itching or discharge (signs of vaginal thrush)
- White patches on the tongue (signs of oral thrush)
- Vomiting

When antibiotics are prescribed you should tell the doctor about any other medicines you take, because some may interact. This means some side-effects may be more likely to occur or the effectiveness of one of the treatments is reduced.

Antibiotics may stop your contraception working, but it depends upon the type of contraception you use and the antibiotic you are taking. It's now thought the only antibiotics that interact with hormonal contraception and make it less effective are Rifampicin and Rifabutin. These can be used to treat or prevent diseases, including tuberculosis and meningitis.

Who cannot take antibiotics?

Do not take an antibiotic if you have had an allergic reaction to it in the past. An allergic reaction would be any one (or more) of the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Itching
- Rash
- Swelling of lips/face/tongue
- Fainting

Even if you have had an allergic reaction to one antibiotic, your doctor will be able to choose a different one for you to take.

For more information read the information leaflet that comes with the medicine.

My actions protect antibiotics.
Join me at www.antibioticguardian.com



Author: Antimicrobial pharmacy team

The James Cook University Hospital
Marton Road, Middlesbrough, TS4 3BW.
Tel: 01642 850850

Version 3,
Issue Date: October 2018,
Revision Date: October 2020

MICB4767

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics, sometimes called antibacterials, treat infections caused by bacteria (or 'bugs').

They come as:

- liquids, tablets or capsules (taken by mouth (orally))
- injections (usually given in hospital)
- in creams, ointments and lotions (applied to the skin)
- eye drops and eye ointments
- sprays and drops (applied into the ear or the nose)
- nebulised solution (inhaled) and
- suppositories

How do antibiotics work?

Antibiotics either kill bacteria **or** stop them growing and multiplying. This is by interfering with bacteria cell walls **or** the way they make proteins and DNA.

Antibiotics **do not work** against infections caused by viruses (such as the common cold or flu) or fungi (such as thrush or athlete's foot). **They do little** to speed up recovery in most cases of bronchitis or ear, nose, and throat infections. Even if you have a mild bacterial infection, the immune system can usually deal with this on its own.

A viral infection or minor bacterial infection can sometimes develop into a more serious

secondary bacterial infection which will then be treated with antibiotics. A secondary infection occurs when new bacteria infect a person recovering from another infection.

When are antibiotics usually prescribed?

Antibiotics are used for serious infections caused by bacteria, such as pneumonia or meningitis. In these situations, such medicines are often life-saving. However, they can be used for less serious conditions such as acne (in creams or taken orally).

The antibiotic you are prescribed will depend upon the infection you have and the bacteria causing it. Each antibiotic works against different types of bacteria. In different parts of the country, different antibiotics may be prescribed for the same condition. This is because the type of bacteria causing the condition and the antibiotics to which they are resistant may be different.

There are a number of antibiotics that are safe to take in pregnancy or when breast-feeding.

What is the usual length of treatment?

The length of treatment varies. It depends what infection you have, how severe it is and

how quickly you get better after starting treatment. It can range from one dose to a lengthy course. Most treatments last between 5 and 14 days.

When taking an antibiotic:

Some antibiotics need to be taken with food and others should be taken on an empty stomach. If antibiotics are not taken correctly, it will affect their absorption (how much gets into the body), so the medicine may not work. Always follow the instructions given by your doctor, your pharmacist and the leaflet that comes with the antibiotic.

Always take the full course of antibiotics, even if you feel better before finishing them (unless a doctor tells you to stop). This is important for your recovery! If an antibiotic is stopped mid-course, any remaining bacteria may only be partly treated and not completely killed. They may then become resistant to that antibiotic.

What are the possible side-effects and interactions?

All medicines have a number of side-effects. Antibiotics can kill off normal helpful bacteria which live in the bowel and vagina. This can allow thrush or bad bacteria (such as *Clostridium difficile*) to grow.