

Antibiotics Information for Patients and Visitors

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. They work by either killing bacteria or preventing their growth. Different types of antibiotics are used to treat different kinds of infection.

When should antibiotics be used?

Antibiotics are only effective against infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics do not work against infections caused by viruses such as common colds, flu, most coughs, or sore throats.

Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when you need them, for example for a urine infection or pneumonia. Antibiotics may be life saving for infections such as meningitis.

If you are having an operation, you may be given antibiotics to prevent an infection. This is known as prophylaxis and is especially common before surgery to repair broken bones and joints and before bowel surgery.

Remember: **Antibiotics won't work in the case of colds, flu or any other viruses!**

How to take antibiotics

Antibiotics are usually taken by mouth but can sometimes be given into a vein (intravenous), into a muscle (intramuscular) or applied to the affected part of the body such as skin (topical creams), eyes or ears as drops.

Some antibiotics should not be taken with certain foods or alcohol. Others are best taken when there is no food in your stomach, usually an hour before meals or two hours after. Always follow the instructions on the label or patient information leaflet.

When the doctor has confirmed that antibiotics are necessary, it is very important to take the antibiotics as directed.

It is important to finish the full course and take the correct dose at the right time to kill all the bacteria that are causing the infection.

Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets and do not keep left-over antibiotics. If you have received more doses than you were prescribed, ask your pharmacist about how to dispose of the remaining medicines.

Remember: **Take antibiotics responsibly!**

Special care

Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, are breast-feeding or have any liver or kidney problems.

If you have had Clostridium difficile (C. diff.) diarrhoea in the past, let your doctor know before taking any antibiotics.

Side effects of antibiotics

Common side effects with antibiotics are diarrhoea, nausea, and vomiting. If these symptoms persist then contact your doctor.

Allergies

Some people can be allergic to antibiotics, particularly penicillin and similar medicines such as cephalosporins, and may experience rash, swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing when they take antibiotics. This is called an anaphylactic reaction, and it can be serious or fatal.

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

Remember: **Remind your doctor, nurse or pharmacist of any allergies before you receive antibiotics!**

Taking other medication

Antibiotics may interfere with other medicine, so it is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you take, those prescribed and those bought by yourself, including herbal remedies.

If you are taking warfarin, you should have a blood test for the warfarin (INR check) three to five days after starting the antibiotic. You should inform the person taking the blood.

Resistance to antibiotics

Bacteria change rapidly – they adapt and find ways to survive the effect of antibiotics. They can become ‘antibiotic resistant’ so that the antibiotic no longer works.

Antibiotic resistant bacteria are becoming more common. If you take antibiotics when you do not need them, they may lose their ability to work.

Taking antibiotics when they are not needed and not taking them correctly, for example, just when you remember or in a low dose, may lead to more bacteria becoming resistant to them.

Remember: **Always complete your course of antibiotics even if you feel better!**

Why can't other antibiotics be used to treat resistant bacteria?

They can, but they may not be as effective, they may have more side-effects and eventually the bacteria will become resistant to them too.

In recent years fewer new antibiotics have been discovered, so we must use them carefully. We cannot stop resistance occurring, but we can do a lot to slow it down and stop it spreading.

Sources of information

If you have any queries, please ask your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist or contact DVH Medicines Information Helpline – 01322 428526 or NHS 111. You can also obtain information from the following NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antibiotics/>

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The Clinical Specialty that has agreed this patient information leaflet: Pharmacy

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