

## Patient information

# Risks and Benefits of Taking Antibiotics

## Pharmacy

### **You have been prescribed an antibiotic to treat your infection.**

Using antibiotics is a balance between treating infections adequately and minimising the risk of side-effects related to antibiotic exposure. It is important to use antibiotics only for the infection they are intended to treat with the right antibiotic choice for the clinical indication.

### **What are antibiotics?**

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. For serious infections they can save lives.

### **Can antibiotics treat infections caused by viruses?**

No – antibiotics do not kill viruses. Common illnesses caused by viruses include colds, coughs, most sore throats, COVID and chickenpox. If you have a viral infection managing the symptoms is all that is required antibiotics are not indicated in most cases.

### **Why is it important not to take antibiotics unless I need them?**

Taking antibiotics unnecessarily may cause some bacteria to become resistant to them. This means that antibiotics can become less effective against the illnesses they are designed to treat.

Overuse of antibiotics can also interfere with the 'good' bacteria in your body. This can make it easier for bacteria such as *Clostridium difficile* (C.diff) to live and multiply in your bowel. When C.diff multiplies it produces toxins, which can lead to diarrhoea and sometimes a more serious infection.

### **How can resistance to antibiotics be avoided?**

We can slow down the development of resistance to antibiotics by using them appropriately. The correct antibiotic choice, for the correct clinical indication and for the correct duration. Confirming a patient's true allergies to antibiotics can also reduce the risk of using antibiotics that have a wider range of activity compared to others that may be more suitable.

### **How should I take my antibiotics?**

Every antibiotic is different. You should follow the instructions on the label provided by pharmacy and the advice your doctor has given you for the antibiotic you have been prescribed.

## **To ensure you get the most benefit from your antibiotic:**

- Take the correct dose your doctor has prescribed for you.
- Follow the instructions on the label on how and when to take the antibiotic.
- Complete the course of treatment unless your doctor or pharmacist advises otherwise, and
- Report any side-effects to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

## **Will there be any side-effects?**

Like all medicines, antibiotics do have side-effects which some patients may experience. Side-effects may be mild, such as stomach discomfort, diarrhoea or rashes. Some may be more serious, such as an allergic reaction. If you have any serious side-effects, you should tell your doctor immediately.

As well as killing the bacteria causing your infection, antibiotics also kill some of the normal bacteria that live in the bowel and vagina. Due to this, some patients may develop thrush when taking antibiotics.

Some antibiotics may interact with other medicines, reducing their effectiveness. One common example is the 'pill' (oral contraceptive pill). When you are prescribed antibiotics, you should tell your doctor if you are taking the contraceptive pill or any other medicines.

Some antibiotics require further monitoring due to their side-effects, if you are prescribed one of these antibiotics you will be given additional information on the monitoring required.

Food and drink may affect how well some antibiotics are absorbed into the body. You should follow any instructions given with your antibiotics about taking them with or without food or drink and about drinking alcohol.

## **What should I do if I have vomiting or diarrhoea after taking my antibiotics?**

If you vomit within a few hours of taking an oral (by mouth) antibiotic, it may not have had time to be fully absorbed into your body, so it will not be as effective. If this happens, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice. You don't need to do this for injected antibiotics.

You may get diarrhoea as a side-effect of your antibiotics. This is nothing to worry about, but if the diarrhoea is severe it may affect how your antibiotics work. If you get severe diarrhoea, contact your doctor for advice.

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Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## Further information

For further information please contact:

Royal Liverpool Hospital  
Tel: 0151 706 2092

Aintree Hospital  
Tel: 0151 525 5980

Broadgreen Hospital  
Tel: 0151 282 6056

Author: Pharmacy  
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