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A guide to...

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Information for adult patients undergoing antibiotic treatment

Patient information

Department	Pharmacy Department
Ratified / Review Date	May 2023 / May 2026
ID Number	44/2107/V4



Pharmacy

Watford General Hospital
Hemel Hempstead Hospital
St Albans City Hospital

Information for adult patients undergoing antibiotic treatment

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you as a patient or carer with important information to help enable you to use antibiotics as safely and effectively as possible.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are prescription medications used to treat or prevent infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics do not work against viruses that cause common colds, flu, coughs and sore throats. Most viral infections are self limiting and will clear up without treatment.

General advice

If you have been prescribed antibiotics, you should take them according to the instructions you have been given and complete the course. Remember to seek advice if you suffer from the side effects of your antibiotic.

When should antibiotics be used?

Treatment

Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when you need them. The dose and duration of your treatment will depend on the type of infection, its severity and the antibiotic used.

Not taking your antibiotic in the way it was prescribed can lead to treatment failure and development of resistance to standard antibiotic treatment. This is the reason why it is important to finish the course of antibiotic even if you feel better.

Prophylaxis

If you are having an operation, you may be given antibiotics to prevent an infection. This is known as surgical prophylaxis and is common before surgery.

If your immune system is impaired, you may be given long term antibiotic prophylaxis to protect you against infection (e.g. after a splenectomy).

How to take antibiotics

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

- Have any history of medication allergies
- Have any liver or kidney problems
- Are pregnant or breast feeding

Some antibiotics may interact with alcohol, food or some medications. Inform your doctor or pharmacist of any regular medications that you take including medicines you buy.

Always follow the instructions from your doctor or pharmacist and information provided for you on the label and the patient information leaflet from the medication package.

Antibiotics must be stored out of the reach of children. Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets and do not keep left-over antibiotics. If you have received more antibiotics than were prescribed for you, return the remaining to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

Common side effects

Like most medications, antibiotics may have side effects. Common side effects may include: diarrhoea, stomach upset, nausea or vomiting. More information can be found on the leaflet in the packet.

If you suffer from the side effects caused by the antibiotic or if the symptoms of the side effects persist then you should inform your doctor or nurse on the ward.

Allergic reactions to antibiotics

Many people who think they are allergic to antibiotics may in fact be experiencing the side effects of the drugs which are in no way related to the allergic reaction.

Common signs and symptoms of allergic reactions may include rash. More serious reactions include swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing after taking antibiotics.

If you are having an allergic reaction after taking an antibiotic, you should stop taking the medication and contact your doctor immediately for advice.

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

Antibiotic used at West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

The trust has guidelines for antimicrobial prescribing for the treatment of most common infections.

The Trust is committed to effective and safe prescribing of antibiotics. Antibiotics are used only where necessary and for the shortest period of time where clinically appropriate.

If you have any further questions regarding your antibiotic treatment, please consult your doctor or pharmacist.