



Antibiotics

Information for patients and carers

This fact sheet is for patients who are receiving antibiotics during their hospital stay. If you are going home with antibiotics, please refer to the list of medicines provided by your pharmacist.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat or prevent infections. They work by killing or stopping the growth of 'bugs' (bacteria or fungi) that may be causing a problem in your body.

Your doctor will talk with you about your needs and recommend a suitable antibiotic.

When are antibiotics prescribed?

Antibiotics are usually prescribed for treating a possible or known infection. Sometimes they are used to prevent an infection.

If you are having a medical procedure that could increase your chance of infection, your doctor may recommend an antibiotic before, during or shortly after the procedure. Your doctor may also recommend antibiotics if your immune system cannot fight off a serious infection.

When you are prescribed antibiotics, you will usually receive a 'course' of antibiotics. This means taking antibiotics for a set period of time or until the infection, or risk of infection, is completely gone.

Antibiotics and pregnancy

Your body experiences many changes when you are pregnant. Some infections, such as urinary tract infections, are more common because of these changes.

Other infections can be more serious during pregnancy and may need you to be admitted to hospital.

They can also cause complications such as early labour or affect the growth and development of your baby.

If you need antibiotics during your pregnancy, your doctor will prescribe them. These will keep you and your baby healthy and reduce any problems caused by infection.

Antibiotics and breastfeeding

You can still breastfeed while taking most antibiotics. Watch your baby for possible side effects like diarrhoea, vomiting, rash or thrush and talk with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any concerns.

What you should know about your antibiotics

When prescribing antibiotics, your doctor should talk with you about:

- why you need the antibiotic
- what the antibiotic is called
- how it will be given to you
- how long you are likely to be on the antibiotic
- any possible side effects.

Detailed patient information is available for most antibiotics.

If you would like more information about your antibiotic, ask your nurse or pharmacist or check the NPS MedicineWise website.

Resistance to antibiotics

Over time, some types of bacteria have become resistant to many different antibiotics. This means an antibiotic which used to work, may no longer do so. These bacteria are sometimes called superbugs. Infections caused by superbugs are more difficult to treat and have a higher chance of complications.

Your healthcare team may test whether your infection is resistant to antibiotics. Your doctor will review your test results and if so, talk with you about other treatment options. This may mean changing to a different antibiotic.

What can you do?

Talk with your doctors about your antibiotic treatment. Let your doctor know if you:

- are pregnant
- are breastfeeding
- have any allergies to antibiotics (it is helpful to tell staff this whenever they start you on a new antibiotic)
- are taking other medicines (even over-the-counter medicines) so they can check if the medicines can be taken together.

Some antibiotics work better with food. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice about when you should take your antibiotic.

If you are being given antibiotics through a small tube in your vein (intravenously) and are eating or drinking, ask your doctor if you can change your antibiotic to tablets.

If you are on antibiotics and experience a rash, nausea, diarrhoea or other side effects, tell your doctor immediately. They can check if this is related to the antibiotics and review them.

Speak with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns.

Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, remember you can ask for one.

For more information

Medicines Information Service

Information about medicines in pregnancy or breastfeeding

The Royal Women's Hospital

(03) 8345 3190

Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm

drug.information@thewomens.org.au

Not all information on the internet is correct

We recommend the following websites:

- NPS MedicineWise
For detailed patient information about most medicines.
nps.org.au
- Clinical Excellence Commission
cec.health.nsw.gov.au/keep-patients-safe/medication-safety/antimicrobial-stewardship/information-for-patients

Information in other languages

- Vic Therapeutics Advisory Group VicTAG
victag.org.au/programs/multi-language-medication-patient-information-leaflets
Search for: Taking antibiotics on discharge from hospital

This fact sheet is based on information provided by the Clinical Excellence Commission. We wish to thank them for their assistance.

Remember

- Take all of your antibiotics
- Follow the dosage directions you have been given

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

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