

# Antibiotics

## Information for patients/carers

### What is an antibiotic?

An antibiotic is a medicine that either kills bacteria or stops them from increasing in number. They are only effective against bacteria and are unable to kill viruses. Different antibiotics are effective against different types of bacteria. Antibiotics are available as injections, tablets/capsules, creams/ointments, eye drops/ointments and liquids.

### Why have you had an antibiotic prescribed?

You have been prescribed an antibiotic because either you have an infection or to prevent you from developing an infection (this is called 'prophylaxis').

### About you

Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, are breast feeding or have any kidney or liver problems or any allergies to any medication. If you are allergic to penicillin, then there are antibiotics other than just penicillin that you may not be able to have e.g. co-amoxiclav or cefuroxime.

### Taking other medication

Antibiotics may interfere with other medicines so it is important to tell the doctor and pharmacist about **all** the medicines you take – both those that have been prescribed by your doctor and those that you buy yourself (including herbal remedies).

In particular, antibiotics may interfere with warfarin (a blood thinning medicine) and it is very important that, if you take antibiotics and you take warfarin, you 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 test that you are taking an antibiotic.

Some antibiotics may affect certain types of **contraceptives** like the contraceptive pill, patch and vaginal ring, making them less effective and therefore increasing the risk of pregnancy. If you are taking or using a contraceptive, please see below for further advice.

### How to take your antibiotic

Please read the instructions on the label attached to the container that the antibiotics are in. With the antibiotic, there is an information leaflet from the manufacturer that tells you about that antibiotic, please ensure that you read it.

Additional instructions on how to take the antibiotic will vary depending on which one it is. Some antibiotics have to be taken on an empty stomach or are not compatible with alcohol or certain foods, e.g. dairy products. If antibiotics are not taken correctly, they may be less effective in treating the infection.

Always complete the course that has been prescribed. If you do not, it may result in the infection not being treated and it may also result in an infection with resistant bacteria (see below). Do not keep any unused antibiotics (hand them in to your local pharmacy for safe disposal) and do not share them with other people.

### **Possible side-effects**

It is not possible to list all the side-effects here, please read the leaflet specific for the antibiotic that you have been given. This is supplied with the antibiotic.

You may develop diarrhoea. This can occur with antibiotics because they may kill the bacteria that usually live in your gut. If this diarrhoea is severe or watery, then please report this to a doctor immediately. This may even occur a few weeks after you have stopped taking the antibiotic.

Should you develop an allergic reaction; signs of which include breathlessness, swelling and rash, **stop** taking the antibiotic and seek medical attention immediately. Ensure that you do not receive this antibiotic or any related ones in the future and inform your GP of the reaction.

### **Resistant bacteria**

Bacteria change rapidly and as a result, some bacteria become resistant to certain or in some cases, many antibiotics. This means that the bacteria have developed a mechanism that makes the antibiotic ineffective so making infections more difficult to treat.

To prevent this from happening, it is important to use antibiotics responsibly, including completing prescribed courses and taking them correctly. Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when he/she feels that they are absolutely necessary.

### **Further questions:**

If you would like any further advice or if you have any questions regarding your antibiotic or any other medicine that has been prescribed at the hospital, then please contact the hospital pharmacy patient medication helpline:

### **QVH Patient Medication Helpline**

**Tel: 01342 414215**

Monday to Friday

9.00am to 5.30pm

If the pharmacy is closed or there is no one available to take your call, you can leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible. Alternatively, once you have left this hospital, contact your local pharmacist or your GP who will be able to advise you.

**If you require further advice about antibiotics and contraception, please continue reading.**

## Antibiotics and contraception

### Will my contraception be affected by the antibiotic?

Only hormonal contraceptives (see below) are affected and these are affected only by the antibiotics called rifampicin and rifabutin. They make the contraceptive less effective, that is, increase the risk of you falling pregnant, and so you must use an alternative contraceptive method – please see below.

Other antibiotics do not directly affect hormonal contraception. However, the contraceptive will be less effective if you have diarrhoea or vomiting – please see below.

### Have you been given rifampicin or rifabutin?

Contraceptive methods **that are affected** by rifampicin and rifabutin:

- combined pill
- progestogen-only pill
- implant
- patch
- vaginal ring

Contraception methods that **are not** affected by rifampicin or rifabutin include:

- progestogen injection
- IUD (intrauterine device)
- IUS (intrauterine system)

If you are not sure if your contraceptive method is affected, please speak to your doctor for further advice.

If you are taking rifampicin or rifabutin for less than two months and want to continue your same hormonal contraception, you **must** discuss this with your doctor. You may be asked to take this contraception in a different way from usual and use condoms as well.

If you are going to take rifampicin or rifabutin for more than two months, you should consider starting, or changing to, a contraception method that is not affected by these medicines. Please see your doctor for alternative forms of contraception.

You will need to continue using the alternative contraceptive(s) whilst you are taking the antibiotic **and for 28 days after you have stopped taking it.**

### What should I do if I have diarrhoea or vomiting?

If you have diarrhoea or vomiting, either as a side-effect of the antibiotic or for any other reason and you are taking an oral contraceptive pill (one that is taken by mouth), it will not be effective and so you should use additional contraception such as condoms. Other contraceptives such as the vaginal ring, implants or injections are not affected.

If you are sick or have diarrhoea within two hours of taking your contraceptive pill, take another pill straightaway. If you are not sick again or do not have any diarrhoea within two hours of taking the second pill, then you will be protected. Take your next pill at the same time as you would usually do.

However, if you are sick again after taking a second pill or you continue to be sick or have severe diarrhoea (six or more watery stools in a day) for more than 24 hours, then your pill will not be effective.

Count each day that you are vomiting or have diarrhoea as a day that you have missed the pill. If you can, carry on taking the pill each day as you normally would **BUT you will not be protected**. You will have to use additional protection such as condoms. Follow the instructions for missed pill in the leaflet that is provided with your pill or contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

### **Further information**

Further information is available from the NHS Choices website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/contraception-guide/Pages/antibiotics-contraception.aspx>