Advice about antibiotics
Information for patients and carers
This leaflet provides you, as patient or carer, with important information on how to use antibiotics as safely and effectively as possible.

**Antibiotics**

Antibiotics are prescription medicines 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.

If you have been prescribed antibiotics, take them according to the instructions you have been given.

If you suffer from the **side-effects** of an antibiotic, seek advice from your GP or pharmacist.

**Treating infection**

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. You will receive a ‘course’ of antibiotics. This means taking antibiotics for a set period of time, or until the infection has completely gone.

**Not taking your course of antibiotics in the way it was prescribed can lead to treatment failure and development of resistance to standard antibiotic treatment.**
Preventing infection
You may be given antibiotics to prevent an infection if you are having an operation. This is known as *surgical prophylaxis* and is common before and after surgery.

If your immune system is weakened, you may be given long-term antibiotics to protect you from infection (e.g. after a splenectomy).

How to take antibiotics
Before taking your antibiotic, tell your doctor or pharmacist if you:

- have any history of medication allergies
- have any liver or kidney problems
- are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Some antibiotics may interact with alcohol, food or other medication. Inform your doctor or pharmacist of any regular medication that you take including medicines you buy over-the-counter.

When taking antibiotics

- Always take antibiotics as instructed.
- If you have trouble remembering to take your antibiotics, set an alarm or ask family or friends to remind you.
- If you are struggling to take your antibiotics, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

*Store antibiotics out of the reach of children*. Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets and do not keep leftover antibiotics. If you have received more antibiotics than were prescribed for you, return the remainder 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.

If you suffer from side-effects caused by the antibiotic, or if the symptoms of the side-effects persist, contact your doctor.

Allergic reactions to antibiotics

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

One common sign of allergic reaction is a skin rash. More serious allergic reactions include swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing after taking antibiotics.

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

If you have difficulty breathing, you feel dizzy or collapse, call 999 immediately.

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 resistance

Some types of bacteria have become resistant to the effects of standard antibiotic treatments. Infections caused by resistant bacteria are more difficult to treat and have a higher risk of complications. Your doctor may perform some tests to indicate if you have an infection caused by resistant bacteria. Your doctor will review the results of these tests and discuss suitable treatment. This may mean changing the type of antibiotic you are prescribed.

Antibiotic use at Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust (OUH)

At Oxford University Hospitals we have guidelines for antibiotic prescribing for the treatment of most common infections.

OUH 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 contact your doctor or pharmacist.
If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221 473 or email PALS@ouh.nhs.uk

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April 2017
Review: April 2020
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OMI 28893P