

## What if I cannot tolerate the antibiotics?

It is common to have minor side effects, such as nausea or looseness of motions, when first starting antibiotics. For most these settle down. For a minority of patients, the side effects are intolerable. You should see your GP if this happens, and s/he can contact us for advice about an alternative. Alcohol can cause some antibiotics to be poorly tolerated.

## Does it matter if I miss or stop the antibiotics?

It is essential that you do not stop antibiotics early unless by agreement with our team or with a specialist in infection. Stopping treatment could allow infection to come back. Stopping some of the treatment could allow antibiotic resistance to develop. The same applies if you are forgetful in taking treatment. We strongly recommend that you do not miss doses; if you do, you should take the missed dose as soon as you can, and take the next dose as planned so that you stick to the same overall daily dose. This sort of 'juggling' of timings should never become routine practice.

## What if another doctor tells me to stop treatment?

If you are on long term therapy, you should make sure the doctor knows this, and ask him/her to discuss with us before stopping. If the reason for stopping is that you are unwell, we would like to be informed.

## How long will I have to take the antibiotics for?

This will be explained to you on the ward or in the clinic. The length of time needed varies depending on the kind of germ(s), your general health and the nature of your orthopaedic problem.

## What if I have other concerns?

If you require further information ask for the 'antibiotic data sheet', visit the website <http://emc.medicines.org.uk> or ask the pharmacist, nurse or doctor looking after you.

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**Bone Infection Unit, Education & Research Fund:  
Informing Patients**

BIU Leaflet 2  
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Supported by an unconditional educational grant from Astra-Zeneca

**Antibiotics  
FAQs**

# Introduction

This leaflet has been written for patients requiring antibiotic treatment. Antibiotics play a major role in the treatment of infection and we would like to tell you how they work.

## What are antibiotics and how do they work?

Antibiotics are substances that interfere with essential functions inside a germ, either killing the germ outright or weakening it for the body's own defences to finish off. Different antibiotics work in different ways and often work best if teamed up in pairs or even triplets!

## Can the germs become resistant to the antibiotics?

This is possible in theory, but uncommon, and varies with the antibiotic and germ. We will often treat with two antibiotics at once, to make it more difficult for a resistant germ to emerge. If you are asked to take more than one antibiotic, it is essential to follow the instructions to prevent resistance emerging.

## Will the antibiotics upset my other medicines?

Usually antibiotics do not affect other treatments and vice versa. However some antibiotics can interact with specific drugs. These "drug interactions" are mostly well understood, and we check for interactions when we prescribe antibiotics. All antibiotics risk altering the effectiveness of the oral contraceptive pill. Women of childbearing age are advised to take other contraceptive measures whilst on antibiotics and for 7 days afterwards.

## What side effects can antibiotics cause?

Stomach or bowel side effects are most common. By killing "friendly" germs living in the bowel, antibiotics may upset the gut, and cause loose motions. Other fairly common side effects are nausea, vomiting and rashes including thrush. Like any medicine, antibiotics can cause individual side effects that vary from drug to drug and person to person. These can include effects on the blood count, liver, kidneys or any other system in the body. These side effect are fortunately rare, and almost always get better as soon as the treatment is stopped.

## Will the antibiotics stop working after a while?

No. Antibiotics continue to work for as long as they are taken providing the germs being treated remain sensitive to the drug.

## Can my body get resistant or immune to the antibiotics?

No. The body does not become resistant to antibiotics in ways that stops them working. It is, however, possible to develop allergies to antibiotics. These range from a rash or fever to a very rare major reaction with facial swelling and difficulty breathing.

## Will antibiotics weaken my immune system?

Very rarely, antibiotic treatment will cause a drop in the blood count, including the numbers of white cells that fight infection. This corrects itself when the treatment is stopped.

## How should I take them?

Some should be taken on a full stomach, and some on an empty one. Occasionally you will need to avoid certain foods. Detailed instructions are available for each antibiotic.