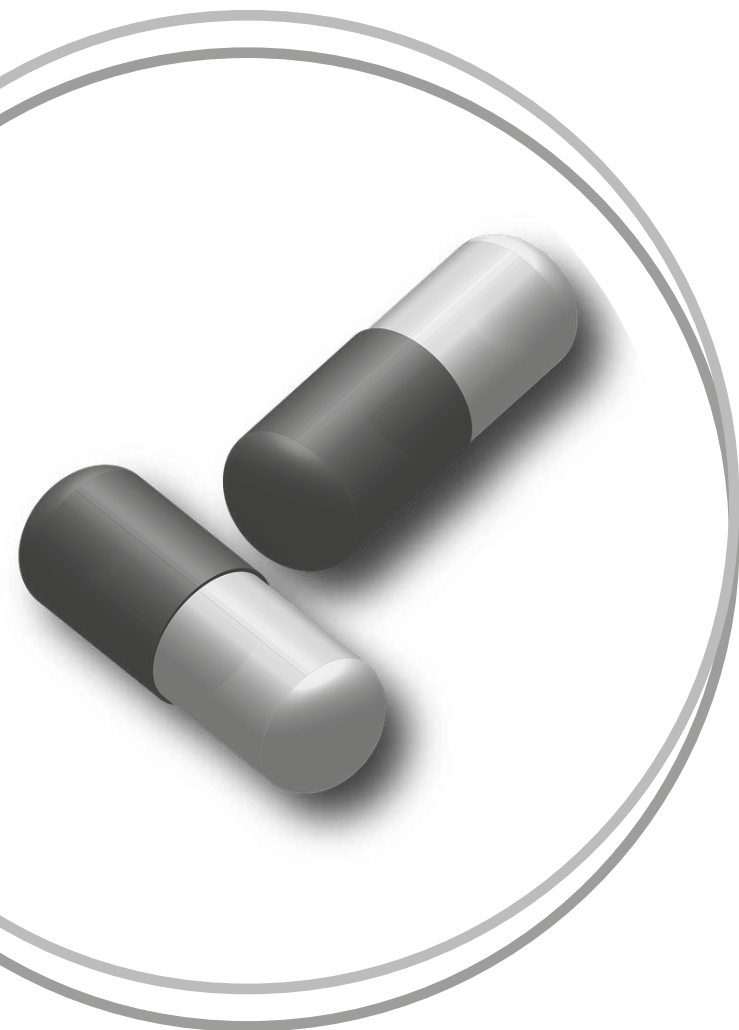




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Advice about antibiotics

Information for  
patients and carers





This leaflet has been written to provide you (or your carer) with important information about how to use antibiotics safely and effectively.

## What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are prescription medicines used to **treat** or **prevent** infections caused by **bacteria**. Antibiotics are sometimes called antibacterials or antimicrobials.

Antibiotics can be taken by mouth as liquids, tablets, or capsules, or they can be given by injection. Usually, people who need to have an antibiotic by injection are in hospital because they have a severe infection.

Antibiotics can also be available as creams, ointments, lotions or drops to apply to the skin, eyes or ears to treat certain infection.

Antibiotics do not work against the viruses that cause common colds, flu, coughs and sore throats. Most viral infections will clear up without treatment.

## Treating infection

You will only be prescribed antibiotics when you need them. The dose and duration of your treatment will depend on the type of infection, how severe it is 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.

**The antibiotics may not work if you do not take them as prescribed. It may also cause the bacteria to become resistant (immune) to that antibiotic. This would mean that the antibiotic wouldn't work for that bacteria in the future. See page 6 for further information.**

## 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 commonly given both 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. Tell them details of your allergy and reactions
- have any liver or kidney problems
- are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Some antibiotics may interact with alcohol, food or other medication. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about any regular medication that you take, including herbal remedies and medicines you buy over the counter.

## When taking antibiotics

- Always take the 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, nurse or pharmacist.

**Store antibiotics out of the reach of children.** Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets. Do not keep left over antibiotics. If you have received more antibiotics than were prescribed for you, or if you have had to stop taking them and have some left over, return the rest to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

## Common side effects

Like most medications, antibiotics may have side effects. Common side effects may include:

- diarrhoea
- upset stomach
- nausea or vomiting.

A full list of side effects is provided within the patient information leaflet. Get in touch if you have any concerns about a potential side effect. You can talk to a pharmacist, GP or telephone 111 for advice.

**You should call 999 immediately if you have difficulty breathing, feel dizzy or collapse.**

## Allergic reactions to antibiotics

Many people who think they are allergic to antibiotics are in fact experiencing the side effects of the medicine, which are not related to an allergic reaction.

A common sign of an allergic reaction is a skin rash. More serious allergic reactions include swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing. This is called an anaphylactic reaction and it can be serious or even life threatening.

Stop taking the medication if you think you are having an allergic reaction after taking an antibiotic. Seek advice from a pharmacist, GP or telephone 111.

**If you have difficulty breathing, feel dizzy or collapse, you or someone with you should 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 antibiotic-resistant bacteria are more difficult to treat and have a higher risk of complications.

The person prescribing your treatment may carry out some tests to check whether you have an infection caused by resistant bacteria. They will review the results of these tests and discuss suitable treatments with you. This may mean changing the type of antibiotic you are prescribed.

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

Oxford University Hospitals Trust has guidelines for antibiotic prescribing. They cover the treatment of most common infections.

We are committed to effective and safe prescribing of antibiotics. Antibiotics are used only where necessary and for the shortest period of time, where appropriate. If you have any further questions about your antibiotic treatment, please contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

## Further information

If you have any questions about your antibiotic, please ring the **Patient Medicines Helpline:**

Tel: **01865 228 906.**

This service is available Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.

The helpline will not be able to answer questions about your illness in general or other people's medications without their permission.

## Further Information

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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