Taking Antibiotics
Information for patients, relatives and carers

ℹ️ For more information, please contact:

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Caring with pride
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What is an antibiotic?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. They are usually taken by mouth (oral) but may also be given into a vein (intravenous), into a muscle (intramuscular) or applied to the skin (topical).

How do antibiotics work?

Antibiotics are medications that work by killing or preventing the growth of bacteria.

Different types of antibiotics are used to treat different kinds of bacterial infections. Your healthcare professional will decide which is the best type of antibiotic for you and your infection.

Antibiotics are only used in bacterial infections, for example pneumonia or urine infections. Antibiotics cannot be used on colds and flu which are viral infections.
How long do I need to take antibiotics for?

Take your antibiotics for the length of time prescribed by your healthcare professional. Different infections require different course lengths of antibiotics.

If you have been issued with full packs of antibiotics, or with antibiotic syrup or cream, and have any leftover after your course has finished they should always be returned to your pharmacy.
How do I take my antibiotics correctly?

- Only take antibiotics when they are prescribed for you. Do not expect your doctor to prescribe them for colds, most coughs or sore throats. Other remedies can help relieve these symptoms – speak to your pharmacist for advice.

- Take your antibiotic at the correct time. The instructions on the label will tell you how many times a day to take them. Try to space the doses out evenly during the day. Some antibiotics are best taken at certain times such as with food at meal times. This will be made clear to you on the label. Simple reminders such as setting an alarm may help you with this.

- Do not open an antibiotic capsule or chew an antibiotic tablet unless your doctor or pharmacist has told you to do so.

- Never give your antibiotics to someone else and never take anyone else’s antibiotics. Different antibiotics are prescribed for specific infections and don’t suit all illnesses.

- Always read the patient information leaflet provided with your antibiotics. It will contain useful information to help you take your medication effectively.
Why is my antibiotic dose different to the patient information leaflet?

In hospital, antibiotics may be used to treat severe infections, which may require a higher dose than stated in the patient information leaflet.

If you are concerned about this you can check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Do I need to change what I eat or drink?

Many antibiotics cannot be taken with certain foods or drinks. This is because they may make the antibiotic less effective and reduce the chances of a full recovery.

Alcohol should be avoided with certain types of antibiotics. If you need to avoid alcohol this will be made clear to you on the label.

Make sure you read the patient information leaflet or check with your doctor or pharmacist before starting the course.
What should I do if I forget to take a dose?

If you have missed a dose but remember that you have missed it before the next one is due, take that dose as soon as you can and then continue with your usual course as directed.

If you have completely missed a dose, do not double up the next dose as there is an increased risk of side effects.
What should I do if the antibiotics are making me feel unwell?

Most people will not have any problems, however it is possible to experience side effects from any antibiotics.

The most common side effects of antibiotics include:

- diarrhoea
- sickness
- stomach pain

If you experience any problems like these let your doctor, nurse or pharmacist know as soon as you can. Your healthcare professional may be able to change the type of antibiotics you are on or change the way you take them. Side effects will not stop you taking the same antibiotics in the future, unlike an allergic reaction.

Sometimes there may be a more rare reaction such as:

- rash
- itch
- or in severe cases breathing difficulties

These are uncommon and need to be dealt with by a doctor as they may be caused by an allergic reaction.

If you experience any problems like these you need to stop taking your antibiotics and tell your doctor immediately. You may need to go to hospital.

If your doctor confirms an allergy you will need to avoid those specific antibiotics in the future.
Can I take antibiotics from an old prescription?

You should never do this unless you have specifically been given a ‘delayed’ or ‘back up’ prescription by your doctor.

Antibiotics from an old prescription that were suitable for you when the prescription was written may not be the right antibiotics for a subsequent infection.

What happens if I am taking other medications?

Some other medicines can interact with antibiotics, by either decreasing their effectiveness or the effectiveness of the other medicine.

Always inform the healthcare professional who is treating you about all other medications that you are taking, including any herbal medication, over the counter medicines, or birth control pills.
Where can I get more information?

If you have any further questions about your antibiotics you can speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

You can also contact the Hospital Pharmacy Medicine Information Service:

- **York**
  Telephone: 01904 725960
- **Scarborough**
  Telephone: 01723 385170

Or e-mail: medicines.information@york.nhs.uk
Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Antimicrobial Pharmacist, Pharmacy Department, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 721394.

Teaching, Training and Research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.
Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format

如果你要求本資訊是以不同的語言或版式提供，請致電或寫電郵

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

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