

Antibiotic Awareness

Information for patients and carers on antibiotic medicines used in hospital

What is an antibiotic?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat or prevent infections. They work by killing or stopping the growth of bacteria that cause illness and are often life-saving.

In hospital you may be given an antibiotic in the form of an injection, via a drip, or as a tablet or syrup. At the time of prescribing, your doctor will discuss your individual needs and prescribe accordingly.

Receiving antibiotics in hospital

Antibiotics are used in hospitals to treat known or suspected infections. The choice of antibiotic and length of treatment will depend on where the infection is and how severe it is. You may be required to continue taking antibiotics after discharge from hospital.

Sometimes antibiotics are given to prevent infection. If you are having a medical procedure or surgery that could increase your risk of infection, you may be given a dose of an antibiotic prior to the procedure. Most surgical procedures do not require antibiotics after the procedure.

Antibiotics are sometimes recommended if your immune system is weak, to help protect you from serious infection, for example, if you are taking high doses of steroids or are receiving certain types of chemotherapy.

What do I need to know about my antibiotic treatment?

When you are prescribed an antibiotic, your doctor should discuss:

- > Why you need the antibiotic.
- > The name of the antibiotic.
- > How the antibiotic will be given to you while in hospital.
- > How long you are likely to be on the antibiotic.
- > Possible side effects.

If you have not received this information, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Antibiotic allergies

Some people are allergic to or experience side effects (such as upset stomach or diarrhoea) from certain types of antibiotics. It is important to understand that not all side effects are allergies, and it may be appropriate to try the same medicine again if it is the most suitable for your infection/condition. If you have had a reaction to an antibiotic in the past, you should let your doctor, nurse or pharmacist know about it and give them as many details as you can so they can decide on the best antibiotic choice.



Never take antibiotics prescribed for someone else

Take antibiotics only as prescribed by your doctor

Don't use old antibiotics for a new infection



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Resistance to antibiotics

Bacteria can develop new ways to defend against antibiotics. When this happens an antibiotic that used to work may no longer be able to cure an infection. This is called 'antibiotic resistance'. One of the main causes of antibiotic resistance is antibiotics being used when they are not needed (e.g. for a common cold or flu) or for longer than is necessary. When you are in hospital, your doctor will discuss whether you need antibiotics based on your symptoms and test results.

How might antibiotic resistance affect me?

If tests indicate you have an infection with resistant bacteria, your doctor will review and discuss suitable treatment options. This may require changing to a different antibiotic.

Receiving antibiotics on discharge from hospital

Before leaving hospital discuss with a doctor, nurse or pharmacist:

- > Whether your antibiotic is being continued or changed on discharge.
- > How your antibiotic will be supplied.
- > How to take your antibiotic, when to take it and for how long.
- > Possible side effects and what to do if they occur.
- > Follow-up advice, including when to see your GP or hospital specialist.

You can ask to have this information written down so you can refer to it later. If you have any questions about your antibiotic, speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

After leaving hospital:

- > Take your antibiotics as instructed on label.
- > If you have trouble remembering to take your antibiotic, set an alarm or ask family or friends to remind you.
- > Finish the course for the number of days the doctor has requested, unless told by a doctor to stop.
- > Speak to a doctor or pharmacist if you have questions, concerns or side effects.
- > If you do have left-over antibiotics, return them to a pharmacy for safe disposal.

Antimicrobial stewardship

It is important that the right type and dose of antibiotic is used for each patient, and that these medicines are used only when necessary. Doctors prescribe antibiotics carefully to ensure they are used safely and effectively, and to reduce the possibility of resistant bacteria developing. This strategy is called Antimicrobial Stewardship.

Everyone can contribute to Antimicrobial Stewardship by taking antibiotics only when needed, and following carefully the instructions for taking them when they are required.

Useful Resources

SA Health www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

NPS MedicineWise www.nps.org.au

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care www.safetyandquality.gov.au

For more information

Communicable Disease Control Branch

SA Health

Email: HealthAntibio@sa.gov.au

Web: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Public-I2-A

*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group.
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