

# RECEIVING ANTIBIOTICS IN HOSPITAL

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS & CARERS

### What is an antibiotic?

Antibiotics are medicines that are used to treat or prevent infections. They work by killing or stopping the growth of 'bugs' (bacteria or fungi) that may be causing a problem in your body.

Antibiotics can be given in different ways, and are commonly provided as tablets, syrups, injections, or eye drops. At the time of prescribing antibiotics, your doctor will discuss your individual needs and recommend a suitable product.



### Receiving antibiotics in hospital

Antibiotics are usually prescribed for treating a possible or known infection. Patients will receive a 'course' of antibiotics. This means taking antibiotics for a set period of time, or until the infection has completely gone.

Sometimes antibiotics will be used to prevent an infection. If you are having a medical procedure that could increase your risk of infection, an antibiotic may be recommended before, during or shortly after the procedure. Your doctor may also recommend antibiotics if your immune system is too weak to fight off a serious infection.

### What do I need to know about my antibiotic treatment?

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



**Why** an antibiotic will be recommended for you



The **name** of the antibiotic



**How** it will be given to you while in hospital



**How long** you are likely to be on the antibiotic



**Side effects** that you may experience



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



Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) in the form of a patient leaflet is available for most antibiotics. You can ask for a printed copy, or access these leaflets online through the NPS MedicineWise website:

<http://www.nps.org.au/>

**DISCLAIMER:** This leaflet is provided for information only. It is not intended to substitute for medical advice and should not be used to determine actual treatment choices or decisions.

## Resistance to antibiotics

When bacteria develop new ways to defend against antibiotics, it is called 'antibiotic resistance'. This means that an antibiotic which used to work may no longer be able to cure your infection.

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). 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?*

Some types of bacteria have become resistant to many different antibiotics. These bacteria may be called 'superbugs' in news and television reports.

Infections caused by superbugs are more difficult to treat and have a higher risk of complications. Hospitals have tests they can perform which may indicate if you have a resistant infection. When test results become available, your doctor will review and discuss suitable treatment options. This may mean changing to a different antibiotic.

## Improving antibiotic use in hospitals

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. Efforts to improve antibiotic use are coordinated by doctors, nurses, pharmacists and hospital managers.

### Activities to improve antibiotic use may include:



Collecting information about antibiotic resistant infections



Reserving some antibiotics for use only in specific conditions



Promoting treatment guidelines to help doctors choose the most suitable antibiotic for each patient



Monitoring which antibiotics are being used and why

## Receiving Antibiotics on Discharge

### BEFORE leaving the hospital

Your antibiotic treatment plan should be discussed with you, including:

- ✓ Whether your antibiotic is being continued or changed on discharge
- ✓ How your antibiotics will be supplied
- ✓ How to take your antibiotic, including when to take it and for how long
- ✓ Potential side effects, and what to do if they happen to you
- ✓ Follow-up advice, including when you need to be reviewed by your GP.

If you would like someone to explain or repeat this information, please ask to speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can also ask for this information to be written down so you can look at it later.

### AFTER leaving the hospital

- ✓ Take your antibiotics exactly as instructed on the label
- ✓ If you have trouble remembering to take your antibiotics, set an alarm or ask family and friends to remind you
- ✓ Finish the whole course, unless your doctor tells you to stop
- ✓ Speak to your pharmacist or doctor about questions, concerns or side effects

### About the Quality Use of Antimicrobials in Healthcare Program

The Quality Use of Antimicrobials in Healthcare Program is run by the Clinical Excellence Commission. It aims to help NSW public hospitals develop ways of ensuring antibiotics are used properly and responsibly.

For further information, please visit <http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/programs/quah>

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