

# Things to consider about **ANTIBIOTICS** if you have an **INFECTION**



**Managing infections can be complex and may involve the use of antibiotics for patients while in hospital.**

This leaflet provides information on:



Antibiotics and what they are used for



The importance of using antibiotics appropriately



How to partner with your healthcare professional to ensure antibiotics are not overused

Information in this leaflet is useful at any point during your care but focuses on when you're in hospital.



This leaflet was co-developed by Pfizer and the Patients Association, in partnership with patients, carers and healthcare professionals. This project was funded and supported by Pfizer Ltd.

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice of your healthcare professional. If you have any queries about your medication please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

# Frequently asked questions



“What are antibiotics and what are they used for?”

“Antibiotics are medicines that are used to treat bacterial infections. Antibiotics do not treat viral infections, such as the common cold and influenza.”

“What are the benefits of antibiotics?”

“When used correctly, antibiotics are potentially lifesaving and can help to fight bacterial infections. Antibiotics may also help reduce the risk of infection from some medical procedures and treatments such as surgery, including caesarean births, and chemotherapy.”

“What are the common side effects of antibiotics?”

“While side effects vary depending on the antibiotic used, the most common side effects affect the digestive system, such as:



Nausea & vomiting



Diarrhoea



Bloating



Abdominal pain



Loss of appetite

“You should ask your clinician or pharmacist to review the information that comes with the antibiotics you are prescribed so that you can ask any further questions about side effects.”

“How are antibiotics given?”

“Antibiotics can be given to you in different ways depending on the type of infection. There are oral antibiotics, where the medicine is taken by mouth. In hospitals, it is common to receive antibiotics intravenously, which means that the antibiotic is delivered directly into a vein. Receiving antibiotics intravenously does come with some risks, such as minor skin irritation and local swelling, but you will be closely monitored in hospital for any serious reactions.”



If you experience serious reactions such as changes in heart rate or swelling of the throat or mouth, you should contact your healthcare team while in the hospital or dial 999 immediately if not in hospital.



“What are the potential risks of using antibiotics when they are not medically necessary?”



“While antibiotics may help to treat infections caused by bacteria, every time an antibiotic is used, bacteria can adapt to it. This means that over time, antibiotics become less effective against bacteria. This is called antibiotic resistance.”

“Why should I care about antibiotic resistance?”

“If you have an infection caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria, there may be very few treatments available to treat the infection.”

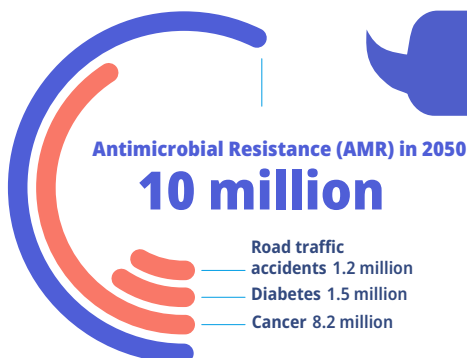
“Since antibiotics may help reduce the risk of infection from some medical procedures, if bacteria become resistant to the antibiotic, then some medical procedures, such as surgeries, may become too risky to do.”

“Antibiotic resistance can put you and your loved ones at risk of developing infections that can be difficult to treat with antibiotics. These difficult-to-treat infections can have a negative impact on your quality of life.”

“How likely is it that I could develop an antibiotic-resistant infection and possibly die from it?”

“More and more people are developing antibiotic-resistant infections. It is estimated that almost 3 million people worldwide are infected with bacteria that are antibiotic-resistant, resulting in nearly 700,000 deaths each year around the world.”<sup>1</sup>

“This problem affects the UK. For example, in 2020 in England, there were a total of nearly 54,000 antibiotic-resistant infections and 2,228 deaths.”<sup>2</sup>



“What will happen in the very near future if nothing is done to stop the inappropriate use of antibiotics?”

“If antimicrobials (such as antibiotics) continue to be used inappropriately, it is estimated that 10 million people a year worldwide will die from antimicrobial infections by 2050, which is roughly the same as current annual deaths from road traffic accidents, diabetes and cancer combined.”<sup>1</sup>

“The crisis of AMR is not far away. It is happening now and impacting people’s lives today”

Following a routine knee operation, Simon developed a life-threatening antibiotic-resistant infection that put him in a coma for three and a half weeks. “It was a real shock to them (my children) and they never expected that my one day in hospital for a routine knee operation would turn into seven long weeks.” To learn more about Simon’s story, visit - <https://www.pfizer.co.uk/responsibility/raising-public-awareness/change-the-course>

<sup>1</sup> Tackling Drug-Resistant Infections Globally: Final report and Recommendations. The Review on Antimicrobial Resistance. Chaired by Jim O’Neill (2016) - [https://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/160525\\_Final%20paper\\_with%20cover.pdf](https://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/160525_Final%20paper_with%20cover.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UK Health Security Agency, English surveillance program for antimicrobial utilization and resistance. Report 2020 to 2021. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1069632/espaur-report-2020-to-2021-16-Nov-FINAL-v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1069632/espaur-report-2020-to-2021-16-Nov-FINAL-v2.pdf)

## How can I partner with my clinician to make an informed decision about antibiotics?

While in hospital with an infection, the clinicians who are involved in looking after you will usually include doctors, nurses, pharmacists and the microbiology team. You and they should talk about antibiotics you may be prescribed and why they are needed.

Here are some questions you or your family should ask your healthcare provider to help make an informed decision about antibiotics.

- What infection do you think I have? Do you know what bacteria are causing it?
- How do you know that this antibiotic will treat my infection?
- What can I expect with using antibiotics?
- How long will I be on antibiotics?
- Can I stop taking antibiotics if I feel better?
- If I am given antibiotics into my vein (intravenously), when could I be changed to oral antibiotics while in hospital?
- What are the possible side effects?
- How do I know if I'm having a reaction to antibiotics and what should I do? What reactions should I immediately contact my clinician about?
- What tests and results will be used to check how well the antibiotic is working?

To learn more about making an informed decision and shared decision making, visit [www.patients-association.org.uk/shared-decision-making](http://www.patients-association.org.uk/shared-decision-making)



## Antibiotic diary

You may also want to consider using an antibiotic diary to track your antibiotic usage history. See below for a sample antibiotic diary that you can fill out when you are prescribed an antibiotic or ask your clinician to help fill it out. Alternatively, you can use the My Medication Passport, which you can find at [www.networks.nhs.uk/nhs-networks/my-medication-passport](http://www.networks.nhs.uk/nhs-networks/my-medication-passport).

### My antibiotic diary

Date:

Clinician:

Type of bacterial infection:

Antibiotic prescribed:

Reason for treatment:

Site of infection:

Administration (by mouth, intravenous):

Dosage / how often to take:

Duration of treatment: Start date \_\_\_\_\_ End date \_\_\_\_\_

Results:

Any side effects or reactions:

## Where can I go for more advice and information?

To learn more, visit these links. You can also ask someone to assist with accessing or printing the information.

- The Patients Association, The patient voice: the secret weapon against superbugs  
[www.patients-association.org.uk/Blog/the-patient-voice-the-secret-weapon-against-superbugs](https://www.patients-association.org.uk/Blog/the-patient-voice-the-secret-weapon-against-superbugs)
- The National Health Service, Antibiotic resistance  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/antibiotics/antibiotic-antimicrobial-resistance/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antibiotics/antibiotic-antimicrobial-resistance/)
- Antibiotic Guardian, Become an antibiotic guardian  
[www.antibioticguardian.com](https://www.antibioticguardian.com)
- Antibiotic Research UK  
[www.antibioticresearch.org.uk/](https://www.antibioticresearch.org.uk/)
- World Health Organization, Antibiotic resistance  
[www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance)
- Pfizer Ltd., Antimicrobial resistance explained  
<https://www.pfizer.co.uk/responsibility/raising-public-awareness/change-the-course>
- GOV.UK, Antimicrobial resistance  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/antimicrobial-resistance-amr-information-and-resources](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/antimicrobial-resistance-amr-information-and-resources)

Also check out this video to learn more,  
<https://www.patients-association.org.uk/things-to-consider-when-deciding-about-taking-antibiotics>

## Disclosure statement

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