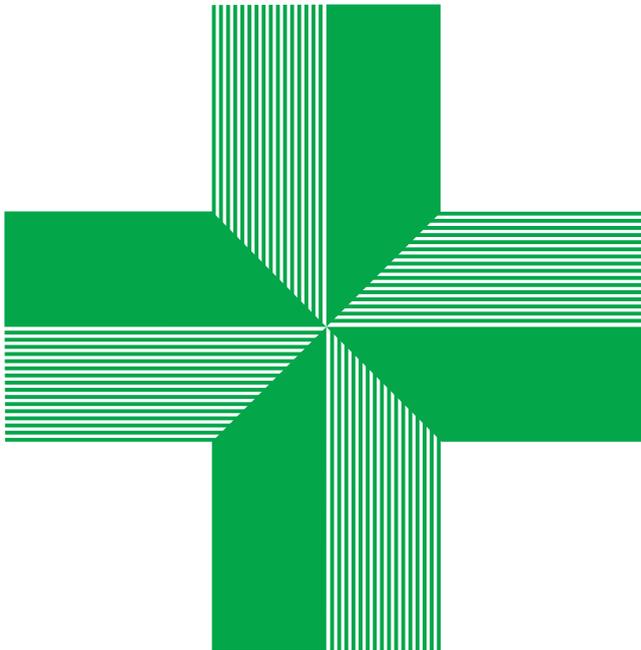


# Antibiotics

Information for patients and carers

Pharmacy Department



Patient information leaflet

This leaflet is to help you get the best from your antibiotic, as safely as possible.

## Key points

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- Viral infections (such as coughs and colds) do not get better with antibiotics.
- Antibiotics can be lifesaving, for example to treat Sepsis (a life-threatening illness caused by your body's response to an infection).
- If you have been prescribed antibiotics, take them according to the instructions you have been given and complete the course.
- Remember to seek advice if you get side effects from your antibiotic.

## What are antibiotics?

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Antibiotics are used to help treat or prevent infections caused by bacteria (germs). Infections caused by viruses (such as colds and coughs), are not helped by antibiotics.

A healthy immune system is good for defending against most bacteria however, you may need antibiotics if:

- You have an infection which is difficult to defend against
- The infection is serious
- The infection does not appear to be clearing on its own
- You have an impaired immune response (e.g. diabetes or caused by cancer treatments)

Antibiotics work by killing bacteria or stopping them from growing.

## What is resistance?

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Resistance can mean antibiotics won't work properly. Using antibiotics can cause some bacteria to become resistant if they are prescribed very often or for very long courses. This means that the antibiotic may not work the next time you or someone else takes it and the infection could be harder to treat.

This can be prevented by taking the correct dose, at the right times, and finishing the course unless otherwise directed by your doctor. If you don't take the antibiotics in the correct dose/frequency or for the duration for which they have been prescribed, it is possible some bacteria may remain which in turn, could restart the infection.

## What are the side-effects?

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Like most medicines, antibiotics may give you side-effects. The most common side-effects are:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Abdominal discomfort
- Indigestion

These are not allergies but are unwanted effects of the medication. If you cannot tolerate these side-effects, seek advice from your pharmacist or doctor.

If you are allergic, you may develop itching or a rash. This is common with many medicines, but can sometimes be more serious. If a rash develops within one hour of taking the first dose, seek immediate advice from your doctor or call NHS 111, (NHS Direct Wales). If the rash develops a few days later, seek advice from your doctor when you can.

More serious allergic reactions are uncommon but include anaphylactic shock (difficulty breathing or swelling of the lips, face or tongue) and blood disorders which need immediate medical attention.

For further information about the side effects of your medication, please read the leaflet inside the packet of your antibiotic or discuss with your pharmacist or doctor.

Sometimes antibiotics can affect the balance of naturally occurring germs in the body and cause other infections. Most commonly, this leads to oral or vaginal thrush. More seriously this may lead to infection with the bacteria *Clostridium difficile* causing severe watery diarrhoea. Some antibiotics are more likely to cause infection with *C. difficile*. You may be warned to notify your GP or Consultant if you develop diarrhoea with these antibiotics. For further information on *Clostridium difficile*, refer to the Trust information leaflet “*Clostridium difficile* Infection” (PIN 160324-1028).

There is a fine balance between treating an infection and the potential for side-effects. If you have been prescribed an antibiotic(s), then your Doctor will have weighed the risks against the benefits and concluded that you need antibiotic therapy.

## How do I take my antibiotics?

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- Take the antibiotic(s) according to the instructions you have been given and complete the course.
- Some antibiotics cannot be taken with some foods or drinks because they make the antibiotic less effective. Refer to the leaflet which will be inside the packet with your antibiotic for information or ask your pharmacist or doctor.
- If you cannot tolerate the side-effects caused by the antibiotic, you should seek advice.
- Any unused antibiotics should be returned to your local pharmacy. Do not flush them down toilets or sinks.
- Do not keep them for next time.
- Do not give your antibiotics to anyone else to take and keep out of the reach of children.
- If you believe that your infection is not getting better or is getting worse, seek medical help.
- **SEEK IMMEDIATE ATTENTION:** If you experience severe symptoms indicating sepsis (fever, shivering, seizures) or severe allergy (difficulty breathing, swelling of your face or tongue).

Before taking your antibiotic, tell your doctor and pharmacist:

- If you have any allergies.
- If you take any other medications including complementary medicines. This is important as some antibiotics interact with other medications.

## Antibiotic use at RSCH

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At the Royal Surrey County Hospital we have guidelines for the treatment of common infections. We are committed to safe use of antibiotics, only when needed and for as short a time as possible. If you have questions about your antibiotics, please contact your pharmacist or doctor.

## For more information

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Ask your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist, or visit the following websites:

- NHS Choices via [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)
- Public Health England is an executive agency, sponsored by the Department of Health that protects the health and well-being of the population. For more information visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>

## References

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- British National Formulary [Online]
- Managing your infection leaflet, Royal College of General Practitioners [online] Department of Health [online]





## Contact details

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### Pharmacy Department

Royal Surrey County Hospital  
Egerton Road  
Guildford  
Surrey  
GU2 7XX

**Telephone:** 01483 464120

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### PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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