



# Medicines to treat bacterial infections

This brochure contains some information on the medicines you may have been prescribed to treat a bacterial infection either in hospital or on discharge. Please talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you would like more information on a specific antibiotic.

## What is an antibiotic?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. They are not effective against viral infections such as the common cold and the 'flu'.

## Important: Antibiotic resistance can affect us all.

Help limit the development of antibiotic resistance by using antibiotics correctly.

Make sure you:

- Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed.
- Follow instructions on how many times a day and for how long to take them.
- Do not stop treatment early, even if you feel better.

Medicine	Other information
Amoxicillin	May be taken with or without food.
Amoxicillin/ clavulanic acid	Take with the first bite of a meal.
Cefalexin	May be taken with or without food.
Ciprofloxacin	Take on an empty stomach with a glass of water, 1 hour before or 2 hours after food. Do not take dairy products, antacids, iron, zinc or calcium within 2 hours of the dose.
Clindamycin	Take with a full glass of water. May be taken with or without food.
Doxycycline	Take with food or milk. Remain upright for an hour after dose to prevent damage to the lining of your throat. Do not take dairy products, antacids, iron, zinc or calcium within 2 hours of the dose.
Erythromycin	Take on an empty stomach, 1 hour before or 2 hours after food. Erythromycin interacts with many medicines; tell your doctor or pharmacist before stopping or starting any medicines, including herbal and over-the counter products.
Flucloxacillin	Take on an empty stomach, 30 minutes before or 2 hours after food.
Metronidazole	Take with food, avoid alcohol while taking and for two days after course has finished. May cause a metallic taste.
Nitrofurantoin	Take with food or milk to reduce nausea and improve absorption. May turn urine a brownish colour.
Trimethoprim	Take before bedtime with a full glass of water to maximise concentration in your urine. May increase potassium levels so check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other medicines.
Other	

## Do not use the antibiotic if:

- You are allergic to any of the ingredients.
- The medicine has expired.

## What are COMMON side effects?

- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.
- Thrush – oral and vaginal (if you or your baby develops thrush, you can visit your local pharmacy for an over the counter treatment). Oral thrush appears as white spots in the mouth that cannot be wiped away.
- Mild rash.

## What are SERIOUS side effects?

- Allergic reactions:
  - » Severe itchy rash, hives or welts
  - » Swelling of lips, tongue or throat
  - » Difficulty breathing.
- Persistent watery diarrhoea.
- Cough, numbness or tingling (nitrofurantoin).

## When to go BACK to the doctor?

- If you or your baby develops signs of serious side effects listed above, stop taking and go to the doctor or emergency department as soon as possible.
- If symptoms have not improved or have become worse after two days of antibiotics, go back to the doctor as this antibiotic may not be the right one for your infection.

## Antibiotics in pregnancy

Most of these antibiotics are safe to take in pregnancy. However, there are some situations when you will need to discuss use with a doctor:

- **Amoxicillin/clavulanic acid** – avoid if you have premature rupture of membranes.
- **Ciprofloxacin** – not recommended in pregnancy.
- **Doxycycline** – used in pregnancy only in serious or life-threatening infections if no other antibiotics are suitable.
- **Metronidazole** – preferably avoid if you are in your first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Nitrofurantoin** – preferably avoid if you are in the last four weeks of pregnancy.
- **Trimethoprim** – not recommended in pregnancy. If no other option, taking folic acid 5mg daily is recommended.

## Antibiotics in breastfeeding

Most of these antibiotics can be taken safely by a mother who is breastfeeding. There are some situations when you will need to discuss with a doctor:

- **Doxycycline** – short courses (7-10 days) are considered safe to use. Alternative antibiotics are preferred.
- **Metronidazole** – may give an unpleasant taste to milk.
- **Nitrofurantoin** – avoid if your baby is less than four weeks old or is G6PD deficient.

## Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about medicines and pregnancy or breastfeeding, you can call the Obstetric Medicines Information Service at King Edward Memorial Hospital between 8:30am – 5pm Monday to Friday on (08) 6458 2723.

More information is also available in the form of Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflets. CMIs are available from hospitals, pharmacies and medical practices and from the Therapeutic Goods Administration website ([www.tga.gov.au](http://www.tga.gov.au)).

### Useful links

- [mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/](http://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/)
- [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/](http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/)



**Women and Newborn Health Service**  
Obstetrics Medicine Information Service  
☎ (08) 6458 2723  
🌐 [kemh.health.wa.gov.au](http://kemh.health.wa.gov.au)

This document can be made available  
in alternative formats on request.

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