

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are used to treat or prevent some types of bacterial infection. They work by killing bacteria or preventing them from reproducing and spreading.

It's essential to finish taking a prescribed course of antibiotics, even if you feel better. This is to prevent the progression of antibiotic resistance. This is when a strain of bacteria no longer responds to treatment with one or more types of antibiotics.

If you stop taking an antibiotic part way through a course, the bacteria can become resistant to the antibiotic, which is how superbugs such as MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) evolved.

It is important that you don't share your medication with anyone else.

Missing a dose of antibiotics

If you forget to take a dose of your antibiotics, take that dose as soon as you remember and then continue to take your course of antibiotics as normal. But if it's almost time for the next dose, skip the missed dose and continue your regular dosing schedule. Don't take a double dose to make up for a missed one. There's an increased risk of side effects if you take two doses closer together than recommended.

Accidentally taking an extra dose

Accidentally taking one extra dose of your antibiotic is unlikely to cause you any serious harm.

But it will increase your chances of experiencing side effects, such as pain in your stomach, diarrhoea, and feeling or being sick.

If you accidentally take more than one extra dose of your antibiotic, are worried or experiencing severe side effects, speak to your GP or call NHS 111 as soon as possible.

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Side effects of antibiotics

As with any medication, antibiotics can cause side effects. Most antibiotics don't cause problems if they're used properly and serious side effects are rare.

The most common side effects include:

- being sick
- feeling sick
- bloating and indigestion
- diarrhoea

These side effects are usually mild and should pass once you finish your course of treatment.

Some people may have an allergic reaction to antibiotics, especially penicillin. In very rare cases, this can lead to a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), which is a medical emergency.

In most cases, the allergic reaction is mild to moderate and can take the form of:

- a raised, itchy skin rash (urticaria, or hives)
- coughing
- wheezing
- tightness of the throat, which can cause breathing difficulties

These mild to moderate allergic reactions can usually be successfully treated by taking antihistamines.

But if you're concerned, or your symptoms don't respond to treatment, you should call your GP for advice. If you can't contact your GP, call NHS 111.

Some antibiotics aren't suitable for people with certain medical conditions, or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should only ever take antibiotics prescribed for you – never “borrow” them from a friend or family member.

Some antibiotics can also react unpredictably with other medications, such as the oral contraceptive pill and alcohol. It's important to read the information leaflet that comes with your medication carefully and discuss any concerns with your pharmacist or GP.

If you have previously had an allergy to any antibiotic please let your dentist know so that they can make sure that they prescribe you an alternative in the future.