

Tuberculosis treatment

You are about to start a course of treatment for tuberculosis (TB). TB treatment takes at least six months but it can take up to nine months and sometimes even longer. TB can be cured in almost all cases by taking the medications for the full course of treatment, as prescribed by your doctor.

TB medications

Any medication can cause side effects. This includes TB medication, however most people do not experience any problems. Take all medications according to your doctor's instructions. Your doctor will monitor your progress during treatment to check the medication is working and to check for side effects. If side effects do occur, you should report them to your doctor immediately.

Some of the side effects to be aware of when taking a course of TB medication are:

- persistent itchiness
- upset stomach, nausea or loss of appetite
- pins and needles, numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- a rash, bruising or yellow skin
- changes in your eyesight, particularly changes in red/green colour vision
- dark coloured urine
- yellow eyes.

The following medications are used in the treatment of TB and are all taken in tablet form.

Isoniazid

Isoniazid may make you feel tired, may cause nausea and loss of appetite and, rarely, numbness or tingling in your hands and feet.

Rifampicin

Rifampicin can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill and some other medications. So it is important to advise the doctor who prescribes your TB treatment about any other medicines you are taking. Women taking the contraceptive pill may need to discuss other forms of contraception with their general practitioner or an advisor at a family planning clinic.

If you have lens implants or wear soft contact lenses, inform your doctor, as rifampicin can stain them.

Rifampicin will cause a pinkish/orange discolouration of your urine, saliva and sweat. This is harmless so you should not be concerned.

Ethambutol or Myambutol

Your eyesight will be checked regularly at the clinic you attend, however, you must tell your doctor or public health nurse immediately if you have any visual problems. You should also stop taking your ethambutol if you experience any visual problems, until your TB specialist advises you otherwise.

Pyrazinamide

Pyrazinamide can make you feel nauseated or cause you to lose your appetite. This medication is usually only used in the first two or three months of treatment. You must report any unexplained rashes, fever, aches or joint pains to your doctor immediately.

Take your TB medications regularly

It is important to remember:

- Take your TB medications as directed. Do not stop taking them, even when you feel better. Not taking your medicine exactly as prescribed by your doctor can lead to the bacteria becoming resistant to the medications.
- Medication must be taken for long enough to kill all of the TB bacteria – 6 months or longer.
- Report any side effects to your TB specialist immediately.
- Tell your TB specialist about any other medications you are taking.
- Avoid drinking alcohol during treatment as alcohol can increase side effects and drug toxicity.

Testing during treatment

Your doctor may order blood tests from time to time to check for any side effects from the medication.

Other tests, such as those on your sputum and urine, may also be ordered to check that your medications are working effectively.

Further information

For further information, please contact:

TB Control Section
Department of Health
Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit
Phone: 1300 651 160
Email: infectious.diseases@health.vic.gov.au

You can get language assistance through the Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS) for the charge of a local call 13 14 50.

Fact sheets available in:

- Arabic
- Cambodian
- Chinese
- Croatian
- Dari
- Somali
- Vietnamese.

You can find more information at:
www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas