

Medications

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You are about to start a course of treatment prescribed by the doctor to treat your tuberculosis (TB) disease. TB is a serious disease that will damage your health if left untreated. TB can be completely cleared with the correct medications.

Supervision

It is important that you take the medication as prescribed. Irregular drug taking may cause drug resistance, making your disease harder to treat.

To avoid these problems all treatment for TB must be fully supervised. This means that medications must be taken in front of a nurse or other health care worker. The nurses at the TB Clinic are able to answer any questions you may have about your treatment for TB. They will be able to monitor any side effects of the treatment and if necessary, arrange for you to see the doctor.

It is **essential** you continue to take the medication, until your TB Clinic doctor tells you to stop (even if you feel better), in order to prevent TB from coming back.

Why do I need to take these medications?

- To clear TB disease;
- To prevent the development of resistant strains of TB; and
- To prevent the further spread of TB.

What medications are used for treating TB?

The medications used to treat TB are usually antibiotics called Isoniazid, Rifampicin, Pyrazinamide and Ethambutol. They may be prescribed daily or 3 times weekly.

These medications must be taken as prescribed by your doctor for at least six months. In some rare cases treatment may need to continue for up to 2 years.

Please be sure to let the nurses know if for any reason you are unable to attend the TB Clinic, or have the nurse see you at home, (e.g. if you have another appointment) on your medication days and we will make alternative arrangements for you.

Why are so many different medications used all together?

The TB medications are antibiotics. They work in different ways to kill the TB bacteria. TB bacteria are slow to die and a combination of medications is needed for at least six months to kill these bacteria.

If the medications are used separately, the TB bacteria can quickly become resistant to these drugs. In Australia, a small number of people have TB that is resistant to the drugs used to treat TB. If this occurs additional antibiotics may be used and treatment may need to be taken for a longer time.

Precautions while taking TB treatment

Alcohol and paracetamol can interfere with the medications. Drinking alcohol or taking paracetamol while you are on TB medications can cause reactions or side effects, which may damage your health. It is recommended that you avoid alcohol during your treatment.

Please note that irregular menstrual periods may also occur during treatment. It is recommended that women avoid pregnancy while on treatment for TB. The effect of the oral contraceptive pill is reduced by Rifampicin, making this method of contraception unreliable. It is recommended that women on treatment for TB use an alternative method of contraception. Alternate contraception should be discussed with your doctor.

If you become pregnant or you are breast feeding inform your TB Clinic doctor immediately. The medications you are taking may need to be changed.

Regular blood tests may be required to check for potential side effects. Your doctor will organise these tests for you.

Medication interactions

It is important to let the TB Doctor know if you are taking other medication or using herbal remedies so we can assess the possible effects that other drugs have on your treatment for TB.

Antacids that contain aluminium components (e.g. Gaviscon) should not be taken within two hours of taking TB medications. Methadone treatment may also interact with TB medications. Some medications for the treatment of diabetes, Parkinson's disease, HIV, epilepsy or cardiac conditions can react with the TB medications. If you are on treatment for any of these conditions it is important that you tell your TB doctor.

How to take the medication

The medications work best if they are taken all together ONE hour before, or TWO hours after, food and preferably with water. Ideally, the medications should be taken at the same time each day.

For patients who have nausea, the medications can be taken with light food (eg, dry toast). If you are experiencing nausea it is important that you tell the nurse or doctor.

If you are having problems taking your medications, please discuss these with the nurse or TB doctor.

Side effects of TB medications

As with all medication those used to treat TB may occasionally cause side effects in some people. If these occur, please report this to the doctor or nursing staff at the TB Clinic immediately.

If you experience any unusual symptoms, or feel unwell for any reason, please discuss this with your TB nurse or doctor. Should you require urgent after-hours medical attention, go to the Emergency Department of your local hospital with your list of TB medications.

Possible side Effects can include but are not limited to:

- Rashes and itchiness
- Nausea (feeling sick), loss of appetite
- Yellow discolouration of the skin and eyes
- Excessive tiredness
- Blurred vision, disturbance of colour vision
- Irregular menstrual periods
- Diarrhoea
- Unusual joint pain / gout
- Fever, headaches and muscle pain
- Increase in bruising
- Orange discolouration of tears, soft contact lenses, sputum and urine commonly occurs while people are on treatment for TB and are not a cause for concern.

Please do not hesitate to discuss any aspect of your treatment with your TB doctor or clinic nurse.