

Tuberculosis (TB) infection treatment

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious condition caused by airborne bacteria. Anyone can be affected.

If you breathe in TB bacteria, one of three things will happen:

- your body kills off the bacteria before they can cause harm
- the TB bacteria make you ill – this is called ‘TB disease’
- the TB bacteria remain in your body without causing harm – this is called ‘TB infection’

About TB disease

When people talk about TB, they tend to mean ‘TB disease’, which you may also hear called ‘active TB’. If you have TB disease, the bacteria are making you ill and you might be passing TB on to other people. TB disease can be very harmful to your health, but it can be cured with a course of medicine.

About TB infection

If you have a TB infection, which you may also hear called ‘latent TB’, the TB bacteria are living quietly in your body. You are not ill and you cannot pass TB on to others. However, the bacteria might become active in the future, making you ill with TB disease.

You can still get a TB infection or develop TB disease even if you have had a BCG vaccination.

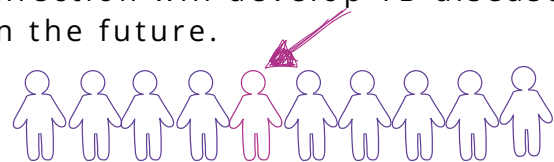
The good news is that a TB infection can be treated to prevent TB disease developing.

How do I know I have a TB infection?

If you have a TB infection, you will not have any symptoms. The only way to know if you have a TB infection is to have a blood test or skin test. If you have a TB infection, you will be offered a course of medicine that will kill the bacteria before they have a chance to harm you.

Will I develop TB disease?

Up to one in ten people with a TB infection will develop TB disease in the future.



There is no way to know if you will be one of them. It is possible to become ill with TB disease many years after breathing in TB bacteria. That is why it is a good idea to put your mind at ease by treating the TB infection while you are healthy and before the bacteria can cause harm.

What treatment do I need for a TB infection?

A course of antibiotic medicine will treat a TB infection. You may be given rifampicin and isoniazid for three months (which is likely to be together in a tablet called Rifinah) or Isoniazid by itself for six months, or Rifampicin by itself for four months.

Your doctor or TB specialist nurse will explain the treatment to you and answer any questions you may have. Make sure to tell them about any medicine you currently take, including the contraceptive pill, as these may not work so well while you are taking TB medicine.

What do I need to know about TB infection treatment?

Take your medicine regularly and complete the full course. The best chance for this treatment to work is to take all of the medication as prescribed.

If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is nearly time for your next dose skip the missed one. Never take a double dose.

**Prevention is
better
than cure**

Tips for taking TB treatment

- take your tablets at the same time every day
- always keep your tablets in the same place
- use a weekly pill organiser (a dosette box) ask your pharmacist for details
- set an alarm to remind you to take your tablets
- ask a family member or friend to remind you to take your tablets every day
- try to take your TB medicine at least one hour before you eat food or two hours afterwards
- you can eat anything you like, but you should avoid drinking alcohol

When I finish my treatment, will I be free of TB forever?

If you complete your treatment, your risk of developing TB disease is much lower. There is a small chance you could breathe in TB bacteria again in the future, so it is useful to know the most common symptoms so you can see a doctor quickly if needed:

- a cough which lasts for three weeks or longer
- fever (a high temperature)
- night sweats
- weight loss
- no appetite
- tiredness

Treatment side effects

As with all medicines TB treatment can have side effects. Most are mild and resolve in time, though speak to your TB Nurse or a pharmacist if these are bothering you as help is often available.

Tell your doctor about any other medication you are taking, including hormonal contraceptives, as these can affect your TB treatment. It's also best to avoid alcohol during treatment because the drugs put extra strain on your liver.

Sometimes side effects can be more serious. Though rare, the medication can cause jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes) or affect your vision. If you notice any of these changes, stop taking your TB tablets and speak to a doctor or nurse immediately so they can help you manage them.

Remember, your TB doctor or nurse is there to help you

Common side effects:	Rifampicin	Isoniazid	Rifinah
Nausea (feeling sick), vomiting and diarrhoea	✓	✓	✓
Flu-like symptoms such as chills, fever, dizziness and joint pain	✓		✓
Rashes and itchiness	✓	✓	✓
Tingling or numbness		✓	✓
Orange staining to tears, saliva, urine and other bodily fluids - this is not harmful but it may stain contact lenses	✓		✓
Menstrual disturbances	✓		✓
Effectiveness of hormonal contraceptives (oral pill, implants or other) is reduced ¹	✓		✓

Information and support

TB Alert information service: for any questions or concerns about TB, email contact@tbalert.org or call **0330 102 2403**.

This number is low cost or free to call by mobile phone, depending on your contract.

Peer support: talk to others who have been through TB online at: healthunlocked.com/tb-alert

Or email contact@tbalert.org to arrange direct support.