

Patient Information

LONG TERM AZITHROMYCIN

Please read this leaflet before you start taking this medicine.

Keep this leaflet in a safe place should you need to refer to it in the future.

This medicine, 'azithromycin', has a product license for use as an antibiotic in the UK. However, you will be taking azithromycin longer term and longer term use of azithromycin is known as 'off-label' (unlicensed). This means that although it is a safe, licensed medicine and widely used as an antibiotic, including for chronic lung conditions, it is not licensed for longer term use. Your doctor (consultant or GP) will explain the implications of taking an 'off-label' medicine with you prior to starting treatment.

This leaflet has been written to explain the following:

1. What azithromycin is and what it is used for
2. Considerations before you take azithromycin
3. How to take azithromycin
4. Specific monitoring requirements
5. Possible side effects
6. How to store azithromycin
7. Further information

1. What azithromycin is and what it is used for

Azithromycin is an antibiotic in the macrolide group, used to treat a variety of bacterial infections of the chest, mouth and ear, and some sexually transmitted infections. Azithromycin is being used in this instance to improve the control of your chest symptoms. It does this in two ways:

Firstly, as a 'prophylactic intervention', treatment is given to reduce the number of exacerbations (flare-ups) of your chronic lung condition from occurring. This is achieved by reducing the number of bacteria in your respiratory tract that have the potential to cause infections.

Secondly, by an unknown mechanism, it appears to have an anti-inflammatory effect in the airways, which can reduce the number of infections you get and also helps to reduce other symptoms, such as sputum production, breathlessness and cough.

2. Considerations before you take azithromycin

Azithromycin should not be taken if:

- you have ever had an allergy to azithromycin, one of its components (see further information below), or another macrolide antibiotic (e.g. clarithromycin and erythromycin)
- you are pregnant, trying to become pregnant or breastfeeding
- you suffer from a blood disorder called porphyria

Azithromycin should be used with caution in patients with:

- heart, liver and/or kidney problems

If you suffer from any of these problems extra monitoring may be required. This should be discussed with your doctor.

Azithromycin, like many drugs, interacts with some other medicines.

Always tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you take, including any over-the-counter medicines or herbal medicines.

These are just common examples:

- **Theophylline** (Uniphyllin, Slo-Phyllin, Neulin SA, Phyllocontin)

Azithromycin can potentially increase the blood levels of theophylline tablets.

- **Warfarin and Digoxin**

Azithromycin can increase the effects of these drugs and additional blood tests and adjustments of dose may be required

If you have any concerns regarding these cautions please speak to your doctor, pharmacist or respiratory specialist nurse.

3. How to take azithromycin

The usual dose of azithromycin is 250mg tablets (one capsule) three times per week; usually taken on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

In certain situations, your doctor may prescribe you a higher dose of 500mg three times per week.

Very occasionally, it may be prescribed for you to take every day.

Azithromycin should be taken:

- one hour before food or at least two hours after food,
- swallowed whole (do not crush or chew), with a glass of water.

Commonly asked questions

Can I take my usual tablets and medication?

- Indigestion remedies should be taken at least one hour before or one hour after taking azithromycin.
- As mentioned above, azithromycin can interact with other medicine, therefore you must always tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you take, including any over-the-counter medicines or herbal medicines.
- Always check it is safe to take any new medicine together with azithromycin.

What if I forget to take a dose/tablet?

- If you miss a dose you should not be concerned. Miss that dose and take your next dose at the normal time.

What if I have an infection?

- You should seek medical advice from your GP, specialist nurse or pharmacist in the usual way or if you have a supply, start your standby antibiotics.

What if I am given/take a course of antibiotics?

If you are prescribed a short course of antibiotics for an infection, you must stop taking azithromycin for the duration of this course.

- You can re-start taking azithromycin on your usual days, once the other antibiotics are finished. You will not require any monitoring.

If you need any clarification regarding this, please talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Can I drink alcohol while taking azithromycin?

- Alcohol may be consumed in moderation whilst taking azithromycin.

How long will I be taking this medicine for?

- If you are tolerating azithromycin, it is likely that you will be asked to continue to take this medicine for a minimum of 6 months, before a decision is made whether to continue or to stop this medicine.
- It is often recommended that you take a “summer break” or “drug holiday” from taking this medicine and then restart for the winter months. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

How do I get a repeat prescription?

- Ongoing supplies will be available via your GP and community pharmacy. Please ensure that you request a prescription from your GP two weeks before you need a new supply, to ensure that you do not run out of medicine.

4. Specific monitoring requirements

ECG monitoring

Azithromycin can very occasionally cause changes in your ECG (tracing of your heart). Your doctor will check your ECG trace before you start azithromycin and at your first follow up appointment.

Sputum checks

Your sputum will need to be checked for less common infections before starting treatment with azithromycin. This will either be checked at the hospital or at your GP surgery, who will provide the appropriate pots and forms. At least **4 sputum samples**, from different days or weeks, will need to be collected.

Once established on treatment, if you are still coughing up sputum, sputum samples should be sent about every 2 months so that any antibiotic resistance can be monitored. Your consultant or GP will arrange this.

Blood tests

Your liver, kidney function and full blood count should be checked before commencing treatment and at week 4 after starting treatment. This will either be checked at the hospital or your GP surgery.

You should have a liver function blood test every 6 months while on treatment.

If you have pre-existing heart, liver or kidney problems, your doctor may decide that they want to continue to monitor the above tests more frequently whilst you continue treatment with azithromycin.

5. Possible side effects

Azithromycin is usually well tolerated but some patients may experience side effects.

Common side effects (which affect fewer than 1 in 10 people)

These may be short lived and you may be able to continue taking the treatment:

- Diarrhoea
- Nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting
- Stomach ache
- Wind
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Headache
- Lack of appetite

Less common side effects

You must stop azithromycin immediately if you have any of the following and you must inform your doctor or respiratory specialist:

- Tinnitus (ringing in your ears)
- Deafness
- Jaundice (yellow colouring of the whites of your eyes or skin)
- Bruising very easily

If you experience any other problems that you think may be caused by your medicine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.

6. How to store azithromycin

Azithromycin should be:

- Kept out of reach and sight of children
- Stored in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light
- Used before the manufacturer's expiry date
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7. Further Information

Medically active ingredients: azithromycin

Other ingredients (excipients and coatings) vary by manufacturer. Several different companies make this product. Please check the individual patient information leaflet in your box of tablets for more information regarding other ingredients.

Contact details

If you have any specific concerns that you feel have not been answered and need explaining, please contact your doctor (GP or consultant), pharmacist or respiratory specialist nurse.

Other information available from:

The following internet websites contain information that you may find useful.

- www.worcsacute.nhs.uk
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
- www.patient.co.uk
Information fact sheets on health and disease
- www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
On-line health encyclopaedia

Patient Services Department

It is important that you speak to the department you have been referred to (see the contacts section) if you have any questions (for example, about medication) before your investigation or procedure.

If you have any concerns about your treatment, you can contact the Patient Services Department on 0300 123 1733. The Patient Services staff will be happy to discuss your concerns and give any help or advice.

If you have a complaint and you want it to be investigated, you should write direct to the Chief Executive at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester WR5 1DD or contact the Patient Services Department for advice.

Please contact Patient Services on 0300 123 1732 if you would like this leaflet in another language or format (such as Braille or easy read).

Bengali

“আপনি যদি এই লিফলেটটি বিকল্প কোনো ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে (যেমন ব্রেইল বা সহজ পাঠ) চান, তাহলে এই নম্বরে 0300 123 1733 প্যাসেন্ট সার্ভিসের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।”

Urdu

“اگر آپ کو یہ دستی اشتہار کسی مُتبادل زبان یا ساخت میں چاہیے (جیسے کہ بریل / ایزی ریڈ) تو پیشنت سروسز سے 0300 123 1733 پر رابطہ کریں۔”

Portuguese

“Por favor, contacte os Serviços de Apoio ao Paciente através do número 0300 123 1733, caso precise deste folheto numa língua alternativa ou formato (como Braille / fácil de ler).”

Polish

“Jeżeli pragniecie Państwo otrzymać tę broszurę w innym języku lub formacie (Braille / duży druk) proszę skontaktować się z Obsługą Pacjentów pod numerem 0300 123 1733.”

Chinese

“如果您需要此份傳單的其他語言選擇或其他版本 (如盲人點字版/易讀版容易的閱讀),請致電 0300 123 1733 與病患服務處聯繫。”

Comments

We would value your opinion on this leaflet, based on your experience of having this procedure done. Please put any comments in the box below and return them to the Clinical Governance Department, Finance Department, Worcestershire Royal Hospital, Charles Hastings Way, Worcester, WR5 1DD.

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| Name of leaflet: _____ | Date: _____ |
| Comments: <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin-top: 5px;"></div> | |

Thank you for your help.