

Azithromycin: Information and Your Treatment Choices

Why have I been prescribed azithromycin?

Azithromycin may help to:

- Reduce flare-ups (exacerbations) of your chest condition
- Reduce the number of chest infections
- Improve symptoms such as:
 - Cough
 - Phlegm (sputum)
 - Breathlessness

What is azithromycin?

Azithromycin is an antibiotic. It works by:

- Killing some bugs (bacteria) that cause infections
- Reducing swelling (inflammation) in the lungs

What are the possible risks?

Antibiotic resistance

If antibiotics are used too often, or not taken as prescribed, they may **stop working as well** against infections in the future.

Possible side effects

Common (fewer than 1 in 10 people):

- Upset stomach
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Skin rash
- Headache

Uncommon (fewer than 1 in 100 people):

- Hearing problems
 - This may start as ringing or noises in the ear (tinnitus)
 - If this happens, stop the tablets and tell your doctor
 - Hearing usually improves after stopping the medicine

Rare (fewer than 1 in 1,000 people):

- Heart problems
- Liver problems

Because of this, we may:

- Check your heart (ECG) and blood tests before you start, but only if the consultant thinks it is essential
- Repeat tests 1 month after starting
- Arrange blood tests every 6 months

Other medicines

Azithromycin can interact with some medicines. Please:

- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all medicines you take.
- Check before buying medicines from a pharmacy or elsewhere

How long will I take azithromycin?

- Usually, 3 to 6 months at first to see if it helps and suits you.
- If it works well, you may continue long term.
- Your treatment will be reviewed every year.

At the review, we will check:

- If it is still helping
- If a break or "drug holiday" from treatment might be suitable

Can azithromycin be stopped?

Yes. You may consider stopping if:

- Your flare-ups are controlled for 12 months
- You are feeling well
- You are having side effects
- Tests show certain infections in your sputum (phlegm)
- The medicine is no longer helping

But first speak to your:

- GP
- Consultant
- Practice pharmacist

If I stop, can I restart?

Usually, yes. You may not be able to restart if:

- You had an allergic reaction

- You had certain types of infection

People respond differently:

- Some stop during summer months when symptoms are better
- Some stop and remain well
- Some need treatment long term

Do I have to stop taking azithromycin?

No. This is your choice.

If:

- You feel it helps
- You are not having side effects

Then your consultant/GP may be happy for you to continue.

Things to think about before stopping

Ask yourself:

- How often did I have flare-ups before starting?
- How often do I have them now?
- How did I feel before treatment?
- How do I feel now?

If you are feeling better and having fewer flare-ups:

- Would stopping worry you?
- Would you feel comfortable trying?
- Would you like to discuss it with your practice pharmacist/doctor?

If you want to try stopping

You could:

Option 1

- Stop for 1–2 months
- Keep in regular contact with your practice pharmacist/doctor/respiratory nurse

Option 2

- Stop for 1–2 months
- Restart if your symptoms worsen and let your GP practice know

BUT if your symptoms are not improving, please make a non-urgent appointment at your GP practice to discuss it.

Summary

Treatment option	Benefits	Risks or consequences
Continue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less worry about what would happen if you stopped • Chest symptom /flare up control should stay the same. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of tablets you take stays the same • The antibiotic may stop working.
'Treatment holiday'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will take fewer tablets • You can tailor your treatment to when you need it • It will help the antibiotic to keep working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have a flare up • You may need to take a rescue pack
Stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will take fewer tablets • You can re-start if chest symptoms / exacerbations return • It will help the antibiotic to keep working • It will reduce the number of blood tests and ECGs needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may have a flare up • You may need to take a rescue pack • You may have to re-start the treatment

Information collated from Blackpool teaching hospital, Royal united hospitals Bath and Oxford university hospitals, information leaflets on Azithromycin use in COPD and Bronchiectasis, and in conjunction with North Tyneside Hospitals respiratory team.