Tuberculosis treatment

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Treatment of tuberculosis (TB) takes six to nine months and sometimes longer. TB can be cured in almost all cases by taking the medications as prescribed by your doctor for the full course of treatment (at least six months).

Like all medications, your anti-tuberculosis tablets can cause side effects. Your doctor will monitor your progress during treatment to make sure the medication is working. This will usually involve blood, sputum or urine tests and chest x-rays.

Tell your doctor immediately if you experience any unexplained illness or the following symptoms:

- nausea or vomiting
- jaundice – yellowish skin or eyes, dark urine (orange/red urine is a normal side effect and is not harmful)
- unexplained fever or tiredness
- tingling or numbness of hands or feet, or joint pains
- skin rash, itching skin or bruising
- visual changes or change in red-green colour vision.

Side effects of specific tuberculosis medications

The different medications used to treat tuberculosis are associated with specific side effects:

- isoniazid – may make you feel tired or nauseous or make you lose your appetite. It can cause numbness or tingling in your hands or feet, but this is rare in well-nourished people. It can also cause inflammation of the liver, so your doctor will regularly check for this with blood tests
- rifampicin – can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill and some other medications. 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 discoloration of your urine, saliva and sweat. This side effect is harmless so you should not be concerned
- ethambutol (Myambutol) – can cause visual problems. Your eyesight will be checked during treatment, but you should stop taking the medication if your vision is affected and call your doctor straight away
- pyrazinamide – can lead to nausea and a loss of appetite. It is usually only taken for the first two to three months of treatment. Consult with your doctor if you develop unexplained rashes, fever, aches or joint pains.

Some things to note when taking TB medications

When taking tuberculosis medications, it is important to be aware of a few basic cautions:

- Report any side effects to your doctor immediately.
- Tell your TB doctor about any other medications you are taking.
- Ensure you take the medication long enough to kill all of the tuberculosis bacteria – a minimum of six months.
- Take your medications regularly and do not stop taking them, even when you feel better. Irregular use can lead to the tuberculosis bacteria becoming resistant to the medications.
- Avoid drinking alcohol while on tuberculosis treatment. Alcohol can increase drug side effects and toxicity, because both can affect the liver.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Victorian Tuberculosis Program Tel (03) 9342 9478

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Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries. If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

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More information

Lungs
Lung basics

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
  CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn from an accredited organisation.
- e-cigarettes
  What do the experts say about electronic cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes – or e-cigarettes – simulate the act of smoking, but you don’t burn tobacco when you use them.
- Pulmonary hypertension
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.
- Respiratory system
  The respiratory system takes up oxygen from the air we breathe and expels the unwanted carbon dioxide.
- Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonitis caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.
- Smoking - effects on your body
  Along with nicotine, people who smoke inhale about 7,000 other chemicals in cigarette smoke. Many of these chemicals come from burning tobacco leaf. Some of these compounds are chemically active and...
- What to expect when you quit smoking
  When you decide to quit smoking, it can help to find out what to expect as you work through the process. Some people have only a few mild symptoms when they quit but others find it harder. While...

Environmental concerns

- Air pollution
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne’s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions.
- Asbestos and your health
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs.
- Aspergillus
  Aspergillus is a fungus that commonly grows on rotting vegetation. It can cause asthma symptoms.
- Bushfire smoke
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health.
- Cadmium
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body.
- Disease clusters
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.
- Smoke from planned burns
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires.
- Wood fires and breathing problems
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people’s health.

Lung infections

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Bronchiolitis
Bronchiolitis is a common chest infection in babies under six months of age.

Chest infections
A chest infection affects your lungs, either in the larger airways (bronchitis) or in the smaller air sacs (pneumonia).

Flu (influenza)
Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

Legionnaires' disease
Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

Pleurisy
Treating any infection of the upper respiratory tract quickly will reduce the risk of developing pleurisy.

Pneumonia
Anyone can get pneumonia, but young children and the elderly are most susceptible.

Poliomavirus - parrot fever
People who have birds as pets, poultry workers and anyone working in aviaries or pet shops, are most at risk of catching psittacosis.

Tuberculosis (TB)
Tuberculosis is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes.

Tuberculosis treatment
Tuberculosis can be cured in almost all cases by taking the medications for the full course of treatment, usually at least six months.

Whooping cough
The major symptom of whooping cough is a severe cough, which is often followed by a 'whooping' sound.

Whooping cough – a family’s experience (video)
A family shares their experience when their baby daughter contracted whooping cough (or pertussis).

Lung conditions

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

Cystic fibrosis (CF)
When a person has cystic fibrosis, their mucus glands secrete very thick sticky mucus that clogs the tiny air passages in the lungs and traps bacteria.

Emphysema
Emphysema is generally caused by cigarette smoking or long-term exposure to certain industrial pollutants or dusts.

Granulomatosis with polyangiitis
Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), formerly known as Wegener granulomatosis is a rare condition that targets the arteries, veins and capillaries of the kidneys and the respiratory system.

Lung cancer
Lung cancer occurs most often in adults between the ages of 40 and 70 who have smoked cigarettes for at least 20 years.

Lung conditions - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is the collective term for a number of lung diseases that prevent proper breathing.

Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM)
Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM) is a rare lung disease that can affect women during their reproductive years.

Mesothelioma
Mesothelioma is a rare type of cancer that can develop decades after exposure to asbestos.

Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) lung disease
NTM lung disease is a serious disease caused by bacteria commonly found in soil and water. It can cause damage to the lungs and make people very ill.

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- **Sarcoidosis**
  Sarcoidosis is not a cancer or any other sort of malignant tumour.

- **Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)**
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**Breathing difficulty**

- **Asthma explained**
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

- **Choking**
  Don't slap a choking person on the back while they are upright - gravity may cause the object to slip further down their windpipe.

- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)**
  Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

- **Coughing and wheezing in children**
  Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home.

- **Croup**
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- **Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)**
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment...

- **Sleep apnoea**
  A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night.

**Related Information**

- **Flu (influenza)**
  Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

- **Asthma explained**
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

- **Pleurisy**
  Treating any infection of the upper respiratory tract quickly will reduce the risk of developing pleurisy.

- **Pneumonia**
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- **Coughing and wheezing in children**
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**Home**

**Related information on other websites**

- **Victorian Government Health Information - Tuberculosis**
My Health Life helps you manage your health

With tools, information and recommendations tailored to you, it’s your personal and secure health dashboard.

Learn more

Multilingual resources on tuberculosis

- Being tested for tuberculosis
- Instructions for collecting sputum for tuberculosis
- TB medications
- Treatment of tuberculosis
- Tuberculosis - BCG vaccination
- Tuberculosis - positive skin test
- Tuberculosis - Information for contacts
- Tuberculosis - tablets for latent infection
- Tuberculosis treatment
- Tuberculosis (signs & symptoms, treatment and prevention)

Medical Dictionary

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