

# **Azithromycin**

## **Patient Information**

## **What is Azithromycin?**

Azithromycin is an antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections.

## **Why have I been prescribed Azithromycin?**

You have been prescribed Azithromycin to try to improve the amount of infections and chest symptoms you get.

Azithromycin can work in two ways:

1. It is an antibiotic and can kill a number of bugs (bacteria) that cause chest infections.
2. It can also have a strong anti-inflammatory effect on the airways in your lungs which helps to reduce the amount of infections you get. It can help with some of the symptoms you may have like breathlessness, cough and sputum production.

## **What dose do I take and how do I take Azithromycin?**

Usually one tablet (250mg or 500mg strength) three times per week on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Sometimes people are prescribed 250mg daily, one capsule daily. It can be taken with or without food.

## **What if I forget to take my Azithromycin?**

There is no cause for concern and you should just take your next dose when it is due.

## **What are the side effects of taking Azithromycin?**

Usually Azithromycin is very well tolerated by most people without any significant side effects.

Some patients do experience an upset tummy, diarrhoea, constipation, dizziness or a skin rash.

Before starting Azithromycin your doctor will ask you to provide three sputum samples. This is to check for a particular kind of infection which is caused by a bacteria similar to tuberculosis. It is important to rule this out as azithromycin can mask the infection.

Azithromycin can very occasionally cause changes in your ECG (tracing of your heart). You will have a routine ECG check before starting the medication. If you experience any symptoms of light headedness, dizziness or palpitations (fast heart rate) contact your doctor. You will also have a repeat ECG one a month after starting the medication, to check for any new changes. If there are any new changes then treatment will be stopped.

Azithromycin can very occasionally affect your liver. You will have this checked by a blood test before starting the medication and again two weeks after starting the treatment. If you experience yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes or any severe stomach pains contact your doctor.

Rarely, Azithromycin can cause loss of hearing. If this happens then you should stop taking the azithromycin immediately and your hearing normally improves. The first signs of this can be ringing in the ears (tinnitus). If you experience this then stop taking the drug immediately.

Azithromycin can sometimes make you more at risk of sunburn and it is recommended that you use a sun block on sunny days or if abroad on holiday.

## **Can Azithromycin interact with any of my other tablets?**

Yes. It can possibly interact with Theophylline tablets which are used to treat airways disease, by increasing the levels of this drug in your blood.

**These are also known as:** Uniphyllin, Slo-phyllin, Neulin SA, Phyllocontin.

Azithromycin can also have an effect on blood thinning (anti-coagulant) medication such as Warfarin and the heart medication Digoxin by increasing the levels in your blood. If you are taking any of these drugs you will need additional blood tests to monitor these levels and you may need the doses of these drugs adjusting.

## **How long will I be on this medication?**

If you are tolerating this drug well then you will usually be on this for between three and six months before it can be decided if it is working.

If it is reducing the number of infections that you are having and/or reducing the symptoms you have of cough, breathlessness and sputum production, then usually you will continue taking Azithromycin. You may be considered for a “holiday” or break from treatment after 12 months if things are stable, usually in the summer months. Treatment would then be restarted again after this break. However, for some people who have lots of infections treatment is given all year round.

## **What if I have a flare up of my chest problems while taking Azithromycin?**

You will still need to take a course of antibiotics for a flare up/chest infection as usual, even though Azithromycin is an antibiotic. You may need to stop your Azithromycin when starting a course of antibiotics. Your doctor will let you know if this is required. The antibiotics you receive should be guided by your previous sputum samples and treatments but the type of antibiotic you receive for infections may change now you are on Azithromycin treatment.

Similar antibiotics to Azithromycin (Erythromycin, Clarythromycin) should be avoided as they are unlikely to be effective.

## Should I stop taking Azithromycin if I need surgery?

You should still be able to take Azithromycin as normal but always check with your consultant who is doing the surgery.

## Does Azithromycin affect fertility or pregnancy?

Azithromycin has no known consequences for fertility. The manufacturers of the drug suggest only using the drug if there are no alternatives as its safety in pregnancy is not fully known. It is therefore recommended that effective contraception is used for women taking Azithromycin. If you are planning a pregnancy then discuss this further with your respiratory consultant.

## Can I drink alcohol while taking Azithromycin?

Yes- there is no interaction with alcohol, however it is advisable to stay within the recommended guidelines.

## Contact details

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact your doctor or the respiratory nurses for advice.

The Respiratory Nursing Team.

Telephone: 0191 4456035 available 7 days a week, 08.30-16.30

E-mail: [respiratory.nursing@ghnt.nhs.uk](mailto:respiratory.nursing@ghnt.nhs.uk)

## Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website (<https://www.qegateshead.nhs.uk/fairprocessing>) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email [ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net](mailto:ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net).

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Author: Lisa Robson