

Azithromycin- respiratory medicine

Information for patients

Why have I been prescribed azithromycin?

Azithromycin has been prescribed to you to try and improve your chest symptoms.

Azithromycin can work in two different ways:

1. It is an antibiotic that is capable of killing a number of bugs (bacteria) that can cause chest infections
2. It has an anti-inflammatory effect in the airways which can help with symptoms such as cough, sputum production and breathlessness.

Before starting treatment, your doctor will ask you to provide sputum samples or look at previous samples to check for certain slow growing bacteria that can infect the lungs of people with lung conditions. It is important to check for these bacteria as treatment with azithromycin can mask the infection.

What dose of azithromycin should I take?

Take one capsule (250mg or 500mg strength) three times a week. This is usually taken on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Some people may be prescribed one 250mg capsule daily.

Your doctor will confirm what dose you should take.

What are the side effects of azithromycin?

Overall, azithromycin is well tolerated and the majority of people are able to continue the treatment without any significant side effects.

However, some people cannot tolerate azithromycin due to stomach upset, diarrhoea, constipation or development of a skin rash.

Azithromycin can very occasionally cause changes in your ECG (heart tracing) so your doctor will check this before starting treatment. If you experience any symptoms of light headedness, dizziness or palpitations (fast heart rate) contact your doctor.

Azithromycin can very occasionally upset the liver so your doctor will check your liver function before starting treatment and after to check for any changes. If you experience any yellowing of your skin or of the whites of your eyes or you have any severe stomach pains, contact your doctor.

Azithromycin can rarely lead to hearing loss. The first symptom of this can be tinnitus (ringing in the ears). If you experience any problems with your hearing contact your doctor.

Azithromycin can make you more prone to sunburn and it is recommended that you use sun cream on sunny days or when on holiday.

What if I forget to take my azithromycin?

If you forget to take your azithromycin, there is no cause for concern. You should continue to take your next dose as scheduled.

How long will I be on azithromycin for?

Azithromycin is usually continued for 6-12 months (if side effects aren't a problem) before deciding if it is working for you.

If azithromycin is reducing the number of chest infections that you suffer from and/or significantly reducing your symptoms such as cough, sputum production or breathlessness, then it is usually continued long term.

Your doctor may also consider a break from treatment after 12 months if your symptoms are stable.

What should I do if I suffer a chest infection?

Although azithromycin is an antibiotic, you will still need to take courses of antibiotics in the usual way to treat a chest infection if needed.

You may need to stop your azithromycin when starting a course of antibiotics but your doctor will let you know if this is required.

Can azithromycin interact with any of my other medicines?

Yes – azithromycin can interact with some medicines. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new or over the counter medicines.

Can I drink alcohol when taking azithromycin?

Yes, in moderation. There is no interaction between azithromycin and alcohol.

How should I store azithromycin?

Azithromycin should be stored at room temperature (between 15-30°C) and out of reach of children.

References:

<https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/document-library/guidelines/macrolide/bts-guideline-for-long-term-macrolide-use/>

<https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/document-library/guidelines/macrolide/bts-guideline-for-long-term-macrolide-use-online-appendix-4/>