

THE
TRUTH
ABOUT
TB

NHS



Public Health
England



About your treatment for **LATENT TB**

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an illness caused by bacteria. When someone with TB in their lungs coughs or sneezes, they send TB bacteria into the air. If you breathe in these bacteria, one of three things will happen:

- your body kills off the TB bacteria so they cannot harm you now or in the future
- the TB bacteria make you ill – this is called **active TB**
- the TB bacteria remain asleep in your body – this is called **latent TB**.

About active TB

When people talk about TB, they usually mean 'active TB'. If you have active TB, the bacteria are making you ill and you might be passing TB on to other people. Active TB can be very harmful to your health, but it can be cured with a course of medicine.

About latent TB

If you have latent TB, the TB bacteria in your body are 'asleep'. You are not ill and you cannot pass TB on to others. However, the bacteria might 'wake up' in the future, making you ill with active TB. The good news is that latent TB can be treated to prevent this happening.

How do I know I have latent TB?

If you have latent TB, you will not have any symptoms. The only way to know if you have latent TB is to have a blood test or skin test. If you have latent TB, a course of medicine can kill the bacteria before they have a chance to wake up and harm you.

Prevention
is better
than cure

Will I develop active TB?

About 1 in 10 people with latent TB will develop active TB in the future. There is no way to know if you will be one of them. It is possible to become ill with active TB many years after you breathe in TB bacteria. That is why it is a good idea to put your mind at ease by treating the latent TB while you are healthy and before the bacteria wake up.

You can get
latent or active
TB even if you
have had a BCG
vaccination



What treatment do I need for latent TB?

A course of antibiotic medicine will treat latent TB. You may be given *Rifampicin* and *Isoniazid* for three months (which is likely to be together in a tablet called *Rifinah*) or *Isoniazid* by itself for six months.

Your doctor or TB specialist nurse will talk through the treatment with you and answer any questions you may have. Make sure to tell them about any medicine you take, or if you use hormonal contraceptives, as these may not work so well while you are taking TB medicine.

Latent TB testing and treatment is free and confidential



What do I need to know about latent TB treatment?

Take your medicine regularly and complete the full course. The best chance for this treatment to work is to take all of the medication as prescribed.

- Take your tablets at the same time every day.
- Tick days off the treatment diary in this leaflet as you take your tablets.
- Always keep your tablets in the same place.
- Use a weekly dispenser (a dosette box).
- Set an alarm to remind you to take your tablets.
- Ask a family member or friend to remind you to take your tablets every day.

Take your medicine between meals and avoid alcohol. Try to take your TB medicine at least one hour before you eat food or two hours afterwards. You can eat anything you like, but you should avoid drinking alcohol.

Make a note of any side effects and tell your doctor or nurse about them as they can help you deal with them. As with all medicines, there may be side effects. Some are mild, while others may be more serious. Depending on the treatment you receive, you may experience the following side effects:

Side effects	Rifinah (Rifampicin and Isoniazid in combination)	Isoniazid
orange staining to tears (which may stain contact lenses), saliva, urine and other bodily fluids – this is not harmful	Y	
flu-like symptoms	Y	
menstrual disturbances	Y	
reduced effectiveness of hormonal contraceptives (oral, implant, other)	Y	
tingling or numbness	Y	Y
rashes and itchiness	Y	Y
sickness or diarrhoea	Y	Y

Very rarely the medication can affect your eyesight or cause jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes). If you notice either of these side effects, stop taking your TB tablets and speak to a doctor or nurse immediately.

Make sure you keep all your clinic appointments and keep in touch with your doctor or nurse. Your doctor and nurse are there to help you. Let them know if you miss a dose or need help to remember to take your treatment. You can fill in the treatment diary in this leaflet and also make notes of the things that you want to mention to your doctor or nurse.

When I finish treatment, will I be free of TB forever?

There is always a chance you could breathe in TB bacteria again in the future. The chances of this are low for most people but it is useful to know the most common symptoms of active TB and see your GP if you have any of them:

- a cough which lasts for three weeks or longer
- fever (a high temperature)
- night sweats
- weight loss
- no appetite
- tiredness

Your treatment notes

Make a note here of any questions or comments you may have. You may want to make a note of side effects, your emotions on a particular day, or any tips you find useful to help you complete your treatment:

Where can I get advice and support?



Remember
your TB nurse
is there to help
and advise
you.

Your TB specialist nurse is:

Your hospital doctor is:

Contact number:

Email:

For help in your language

Ask your doctor or nurse for information about local translation and interpreting services.

Other sources of information and advice



TB Alert

The UK's national TB charity

www.tbalert.org

www.thetruthabouttb.org/latent-tb

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

