

# TB

## Staying on Track with Tuberculosis Medicine



**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention**  
National Center for HIV/AIDS,  
Viral Hepatitis, STD, and  
TB Prevention



## What's Inside:

Read this brochure to learn about TB and what you can do to get healthy. Put it in a familiar place to pull out and read when you have questions. Follow the treatment to get cured from TB.

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## Your questions answered about TB.

### About TB infection:

TB infection means you have only dormant TB germs in your body. This means the germs are sleeping, so they are not making you sick and you cannot pass them to anyone else. When you have TB infection:

- You have only dormant (sleeping) TB germs in your body, so they are not making you sick.
- You cannot pass these TB germs to others.
- Yet—if you don't take medicine to kill the TB germs now, you can get sick with TB disease in the future. And if you get sick with TB disease, you can pass TB germs to others.



**You will need to take TB medicine to make sure all the TB germs in your body are killed so you don't get TB disease. You will need to take the TB medicine for 3, 6, or 9 months, depending on what your doctor thinks is best for you.**

### About TB disease:

TB disease means you have active TB germs in your body that can make you and others around you very sick. If you have TB disease:

- You have active TB germs in your body. You may feel sick and might cough, lose weight, feel tired, have a fever, chills or have night sweats until you get treatment.
- You can pass TB germs to your family, friends, and others around you if you don't take TB medicine the right way.
- Usually, after you have been on the TB medicine for several weeks, your doctor will be able to tell when you are no longer passing TB germs to others.
- You will need to take TB medicine correctly for at least 6 months to be cured.



### **Why should I take the medicine if I don't feel sick?**

If you have **TB infection**, the TB germs in your body are dormant (sleeping), so you will not feel sick. But it is important to take TB medicine to kill these TB germs. Even though the TB germs are dormant, they are still very strong. As long as you have TB germs in your body, they can wake-up, multiply, and make you sick with TB disease. The only way to get rid of them is by taking TB medicines.

If you have **TB disease**, you must remember that TB germs die very slowly. Even if you feel better after a few weeks on the TB medicines, it does not mean all the TB germs are dead. Treating TB takes months. Staying on your medicine the way you are supposed to is the only way to cure TB.

### **Important points to remember:**

- Anyone can breathe in TB germs and get TB infection.
- TB infection can turn into TB disease if left untreated. This can happen more easily if you have other health problems like HIV infection or diabetes.
- You will need treatment, whether you have TB disease or TB infection.

### **With TB infection:**

You cannot pass TB germs to other people. You can go to work and school. You will need to stay on medicine so you don't get TB disease. You will need to stay on the TB medicine for 3, 6, or 9 months, depending on what your doctor thinks is best for you.

### **With TB disease:**

You will need to take TB medicine for at least 2 to 3 weeks before you can no longer spread TB germs to other people. Even if you start to feel better, you will need to stay on medicine to be cured. You will need to take several kinds of pills for at least 6 months.



**There is a lot of information to learn about TB. Ask your doctor or healthcare provider any questions you may have about your treatment.**



**Take your TB medicines the right way, as your doctor or healthcare provider tells you.**

TB germs are strong, and it can take a long time for them to die. You must complete the treatment and take ALL of the doses of medicine to be cured of TB.

**A special word for women:** Tell your doctor if you are, or think you are pregnant, or breastfeeding before you start any TB medicines. Some birth control pills may not work as well when you take them with TB medicines.

**Both men and women:** Make sure you tell your doctor if you have HIV/AIDS or any other health problem. Sometimes taking certain medicines together can make you have a reaction. It is important for your doctor to know all of the medicines you are taking. Then, your doctor can choose the TB medicines that will work best for you. Write down all of the medicines you are taking. Bring the list with you when you visit the doctor.

## Treatment for TB infection

TB infection and TB disease are not treated the same way. If you have TB infection, you will probably just take INH (Isoniazid) for 6 to 9 months, or you may take INH and Rifapentine (RPT) for 3 months. Together, you and your doctor will decide which medicine is right for you.



“At first I had stomach aches when I took INH. My doctor talked with me about it and ran some tests. It turned out that I should just have a little food before I take my pills. Now I have some crackers or a piece of bread before I take my medicine and I don't have stomach aches anymore.”

## **Like all medicines, the medicine you take to cure TB infection can have side effects.**

If you are taking INH, or INH and RPT, tell your doctor right away if you have:

- Dizziness when sitting, standing or lying down.
- Less appetite, or no appetite for food.
- Stomach upset, nausea, or vomiting.
- Pain in your lower chest or heartburn.
- Flu-like symptoms with or without fever.
- Severe tiredness or weakness.
- Fevers or chills.
- Severe diarrhea or light colored stools (poop).
- Brown, tea-colored, or cola-colored urine.
- Skin or whites of your eyes appear yellow.
- Skin rash or itching.
- Bruises, or red and purple spots on your skin that you cannot explain.
- Nosebleeds, or bleeding from your gums or around your teeth.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain or tingling in your hands, arms and legs.

**NOTE:** People react differently to medicines. If you think you are having any reaction to your treatment, call the doctor right away.

**The good news:** Most people can take their TB medicine without any problems.

## Once I complete treatment for TB infection, can I get TB infection again?

Yes. The treatment you receive for TB infection only treats the TB germs in your body now. There is a chance that you can be around someone else with TB and get new TB germs. Yet most healthy people won't need to be treated ever again.

## After I complete treatment for TB infection, does that mean I will not get TB disease?

The medicine does not work for everyone, but it works really well for most people. Most people who complete treatment for TB infection will not get TB disease.



**If you are taking medicine for TB infection, write any questions you have about your medicine here to share with your doctor:**

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## Treatment for TB disease

### Treatment for TB disease:

If you have TB disease, you will take several medicines when you start your treatment to kill the TB germs in your body.

### They are:

1. Isoniazid (i-so-ni-a-zid), also called INH
2. Rifampin (ri-fam-pin)
3. Ethambutol (eth-am-byoo-tol)
4. Pyrazinamide (peer-a-zin-a-mide)



Like all medicines, TB medicines can have side effects. However, most people can take their TB medicines without any problems.



“I was pretty surprised that Rifampin turned my urine, saliva, and even my tears bright orange. I heard it was a common side effect, but it still took some getting used to. I had to switch from wearing contact lenses to glasses while I was on it.”



**If you are being treated for TB disease, tell your doctor right away if you have:**

- A fever.
- A rash.
- Aching joints.
- Aches or tingling in your fingers or toes.
- An upset stomach, nausea, or stomach cramps.
- Vomiting.
- Changes in your eyesight such as blurred vision.
- Changes in your hearing such as ringing in your ears.
- Dizziness.
- Bruising.
- Easy bleeding with cuts.
- Less appetite or no appetite for food.
- Tingling or numbness around the mouth.
- Yellow skin or eyes.

**You will have tests to check on side effects and how the medicines are working.**

- Depending on your medicine plan, your doctor may ask for blood, phlegm, or urine tests while you are on treatment. These tests will help show if your TB medicines are working the right way and how your body is handling the medicine. If you are being treated for TB disease, you may also get additional chest x-rays.
- If you have TB disease along with other health problems, like HIV infection or diabetes, you may need to have blood, phlegm, or urine tests before and after treatment, as well.



**If you are taking medicine for TB disease, write any questions you have about your medicines here to share with your doctor:**

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### **Take your pills until your doctor tells you to stop.**

If you stop taking medicines for TB disease early or do not take them the right way:

1. You can become sick again and stay sick for a longer time.
2. The medicines can stop working and you may have to take different medicines that have more side effects.
3. Even the new medicines may not work to cure the TB.
4. You can pass TB germs on to others again.

### **What is “DOT” and how does it work?**

DOT is short for Directly Observed Therapy. Some clinics and health departments offer this program to help you through the treatment for TB disease. Depending on your medicine plan, a healthcare worker will meet with you every day or a few times a week to watch you take your TB pills. He or she will bring you your pills at the place and time that is most easy for you. This can help you stay with your medicine plan.

### **Once I complete treatment for TB disease and I’m cured, can I get TB again?**

Yes, but this is not likely. After you take the medicine the right way for as long as your doctor tells you, your chance of getting TB again is low. Now that you have had TB disease, you know what the signs are. If you notice any of those signs, you should call your doctor right away.



## **How do I tell my family and friends I am being treated for TB disease?**

You may want to talk to your family and friends about TB. Share this brochure and other information you have learned about TB.

### **Let them know:**

- Anyone can get TB.
- You are taking your TB medicine the right way.
- Usually, after you have been on the TB medicine for several weeks, your doctor will be able to tell when you are no longer passing TB germs to others.
- A healthcare worker may speak with them about their chances of getting TB. They may need to have a TB skin test or TB blood test and x-ray.

## **In your first few weeks of treatment for TB disease, you will need to:**

- Stay at home until your doctor or healthcare provider says you may return to school or work.
- Ask friends not to visit until your doctor or healthcare provider says you can have visitors.
- Put all tissues in a trash bag. Close the bag until you can throw it away.
- Keep windows open in your home, if possible, until your doctor says you cannot pass TB germs to others.
- Take your medicine as your doctor says.
- Always follow your doctor's instructions. Ask questions if you don't understand.

**Keep this list in a place where you can read it often.**

Your doctor may ask you to wear a special mask at home, so you don't put TB germs into the air. If you are not wearing a mask, you should cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough, laugh, or sneeze.

## Staying on track with your medicine plan



Whether you have TB infection or TB disease, taking medicine each day can be difficult. Remind yourself you are staying on your treatment plan to kill all the TB germs. You have done other tough things in your life and you can do this too!

Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about any problems or concerns you have while taking your pills. Your healthcare provider will help you find a medicine plan that works for you.

**Keep telling yourself that the pills can help you beat TB.**

**Remember to:**

1. Always take your full dose, even when you feel good.
2. Talk to your doctor about any problems with your medicine.
3. Ask your family and friends for support.

## Try these tips:

James and Jorge came up with plans that made taking TB pills easier. Can their tips work for you?



### **Challenge: Taking my pills was a chore!**

“Sure, I wanted to get rid of my TB infection, but I still found it hard to take all my medicine. I guess it’s just human nature—I was feeling good so it was hard to take the pills.” –James

### **James’ solution:**

“What kept me on track? I put a note in my wallet next to a picture of my family that said “James—stay healthy for your family.”



### **Challenge: I have more than one health problem.**

“I have HIV infection and TB disease. Talk about pills—my counter looks like a drug store. I needed help keeping track of them all.” –Jorge

### **Jorge’s solution:**

“I found support at the TB clinic. I’m in a Directly Observed Therapy program, DOT for short. The people are friendly and we worked out a pill plan that really works. A healthcare worker meets with me at home every day and watches me take my medicine, so I don’t confuse my pills or forget to take them. She gives me the encouragement I need. I know I will be cured, because with her help, I will complete my treatment plan.”

**If you are not in a DOT (Directly Observed Therapy) program, take steps to remember to take your pills.**

Check off the tips you will try:

- Take your medicine at the same time each day.
- Wear a watch to keep track of the time. Set your watch alarm for the time you need to take your pills.
- Use a pillbox and put a week's worth of pills in the box.
- Keep your medicine in one place where you can't miss it.
- Write yourself a note. Put it on your bathroom mirror or on your refrigerator.
- Ask a family member or friend to help you remember.
- Use a calendar to check off the days you have taken your medicine.

**Write the names and amount of medicine you are taking each day to kill the TB germs here:**

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**List any other medicines you are taking here:**

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## **If you miss a dose or forget to take your medicine:**

- If you miss one dose or forget to take the pills **ONE TIME**, don't worry. Just take the next dose when you are scheduled.
- If you forget your medicine more than one time, call your doctor or healthcare provider **BEFORE** you take the next dose. He or she will tell you what to do next.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you are not in a DOT program and you are having trouble remembering your medicine. Your healthcare provider will help find a plan that will work for you.

## **The longest journey begins with a single step.**

Taking medicine regularly can be a challenge. Some days you may feel like giving up. Yet, you know that you can do this—one day at a time. It takes a lot of work to stay on a medicine plan. But taking your medicines the right way, just as your doctor or healthcare provider tells you, means soon you will be free of TB germs in your body.

Ask your healthcare provider and your family and friends for help along the way. Together—you will succeed!







**For more information on TB, call your  
local health department at**



**or visit the CDC Division of  
Tuberculosis Elimination website at  
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb>**

Developed in partnership with the Global Tuberculosis Institute at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

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