

# Active Tuberculosis (TB)

Respiratory Centre

## Introduction

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection which can be treated. Worldwide, TB remains a relatively common cause of illness, and is usually spread by coughing.

## When did I catch the infection?

It is possible you caught TB recently (within weeks or months), however, TB can lie resting (lying dormant) for many years. It is even possible that you were exposed to TB as a child, yet only have problems when you are much older.

## What are the symptoms of TB?

Different people may have very different symptoms. Some people feel well but may have a mild cough, and may remain like this for a long time. Other symptoms include weight loss, drenching night sweats, coughing sputum (phlegm) or coughing blood.

However, while many people have quite mild symptoms, others may have more serious symptoms, and if they do not receive treatment they can become seriously unwell and even die. This is unusual.

## Does TB only affect the lungs?

The TB usually enters the body through the lungs, however, it can spread to any part of the body.

## Is TB infectious?

Some people with TB can spread the infection to others. However, this is usually only the case if and the infection affects their lungs.

Some people can easily spread TB to others. Others may only spread TB if they spend a very long time with people (e.g. live in the same house). However, some people will not spread TB even if you spend a long time with them. Your treating nurses and doctors can explain this further.

**The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.**

- **Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available**
- **If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111**
- **Keep the environment clean and tidy**
- **Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.**

## What do I need to do if I have infectious TB?

If you are told that you have infectious TB, you may spread infection to others. Until you are told it is safe, you should:

- NOT use buses, trains or trams.
- NOT go to work.
- **NOT fly on a plane.**
- Avoid crowds.

## What tests are available?

If TB is suspected, you will have a chest X-ray and blood tests. We would often ask you to send sputum (phlegm) samples. It is important that you try to cough up something off your chest for these samples, but even spit samples can help.

Other tests can be performed, but this will depend on your symptoms and where the infection is suspected.

## Can a blood test confirm TB?

No: worldwide there is no perfect blood test for TB. Blood tests can show if you have been exposed to TB in the past. However, if they are positive it does not mean that you have active infection with TB. Also the blood tests are not always positive even if you do have TB.

## How is TB confirmed?

Your treating healthcare team will make a diagnosis based on your symptoms, your X-rays, and any samples that are sent.

The TB bacteria can be difficult to detect, and even when samples are sent we may not always find the bacteria. However, it is important to try, as this can help with treatment.

## What is the treatment for TB?

Treatment may need to vary from person to person, however, it usually involves taking tablets every day for around 6 months. The course may need to be longer for some people.

**You should take the treatment first thing in the morning, on an empty stomach, at least 30 minutes before food (or drinks containing milk). This helps the medication to be absorbed.**

## Can I stop treatment early?

No. If you stop treatment before the end of your course, then you have a much higher chance of the treatment failing. If this happens, resistance may occur, and it may be harder to treat. You must talk to your treating nurses and doctors if you are thinking about this.

## Does treatment cause side-effects?

Most people do NOT have serious side-effects from treatment.

You may feel sick in the first few weeks, or you may have some itching of the skin. This usually gets better after a few weeks, but treatment can help with this: please ask.

If you develop yellowing of the eyes, you start to vomit, you have persistent pain in the tummy, you should stop treatment and seek urgent advice from a doctor or nurse, and contact the TB team the next working day. This is uncommon.

If you develop problems with your eyesight or you develop pins and needles that will not go away, then you should contact the TB team the next working day. This is uncommon.

## Your urine will turn orange: don't worry

Your urine will turn orange on treatment. This is normal, and does not cause any harm. If you wear contact lenses seek advice, as your tears may turn orange.

## Does the treatment interfere with other medications?

It can. So please provide a list of all your medications to the TB team so that we can check that they are safe. If you need treatment for other problems whilst on treatment for TB, seek advice.

If you take the **oral contraceptive pill**, ask for advice as the treatment for TB may stop this working. You must use other methods of contraception whilst you are on treatment.

## Will the treatment cure the TB?

If you **take your treatment every day for as long as the TB team advise**, you have a very good chance of cure. In fact, for every 100 people correctly treated for TB, 97 people will be fully cured. There is a small chance of the infection returning: other treatments may be needed in a small number of patients.

If you have had TB, you are not "immune" to catching TB from someone else in the future. If you start to lose weight, have drenching night sweats, or a cough that lasts more than 3 weeks: ask a healthcare worker (your GP or nurse or TB team), could this be TB?

## Does the food I eat or alcohol affect treatment?

You should NOT drink alcohol whilst on treatment as it can make treatment less effective, and will increase the risk of liver side-effects.

A healthy balanced diet may help. Also, you should avoid eating fatty food regularly (including take-aways). You should also avoid cheese, too much tea or coffee, and certain fish (especially tuna, mackerel and salmon). These can make you feel unwell, flushed, faint or make your heart race.

## What about my family and work colleagues?

If you have *infectious* TB affecting your lungs, then the people you live with will be screened for TB, and offered treatment if they have signs of problems from this.

We would only screen other people (for example friends or work colleagues) if you are very infectious. This decision is taken after discussion with a number of experts, and please discuss this further with your TB nurses.

## Any questions?

Use the website <https://www.thetruthabouttb.org/>

Or speak to your TB nursing team on 01902 695940

## English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

## Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

## Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

## Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

## Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。