

## Community COPD service

# Azithromycin and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Azithromycin is a type of antibiotic called a 'macrolide'. Antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by microorganisms, such as bacteria.

You have been prescribed azithromycin as a preventative treatment to try to improve the control of your chest symptoms and exacerbations (lung attacks).

### How azithromycin works

Azithromycin kills certain bacteria and reduces inflammation in the lungs. This may help to reduce the number of exacerbations you have.

Azithromycin may help reduce symptoms such as coughing, sputum (phlegm) and breathlessness.

### Before you take azithromycin

Do not take this medicine if you are allergic to azithromycin, or any of its ingredients or any other macrolide antibiotic, such as erythromycin or clarithromycin.

Your specialist doctor or nurse will usually ask you to provide a sputum sample, to check for antibiotic resistant organisms. It is important that we check for these before starting treatment, as we cannot use azithromycin if these are present.



## Patient Information

Your specialist doctor or nurse will ask for a heart trace (ECG) before starting this treatment, to check the rhythm of your heart. You will also have blood tests to check your liver function so we can monitor whether azithromycin affects the liver.

### **Dose**

The usual dose is one 250mg capsule, 3 times a week (usually Monday, Wednesday and Friday). But you may be prescribed a higher dose.

### **Side effects**

Azithromycin doesn't usually cause any side effects.

Less than 10 in 100 people may experience tummy upset, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, constipation, dizziness, headaches, or a skin rash.

Less common side effects include hearing loss and tinnitus (ringing in the ears). If you experience this symptom azithromycin should be stopped immediately. Your hearing will then gradually return to normal.

Less than 1 in 10,000 people experience changes in their heart tracing or an effect on their liver. Your doctor is likely to repeat your heart tracing and liver blood tests once you have started azithromycin to monitor this.

For more information on side effects please see the manufacturer's patient information leaflet. This will be in the medicine's box.

### **Monitoring**

Your specialist doctor or nurse will arrange for you to have repeat liver function blood tests and an ECG 1 month after starting the treatment. You will then have repeat liver blood tests every 6 months.

### **If you forget to take a dose**

This should not cause any problems. Just take your next dose as planned.

### **How long you'll be on azithromycin**

You are likely to need to take azithromycin for 3 to 6 months. We'll then review whether it's working. If it's reducing the number of exacerbations that you suffer from and reducing your symptoms, then you can continue to take it.

### **Taking azithromycin with other medicines**

Tell your specialist doctor or nurse all the medicines you are taking before you start azithromycin, including over-the-counter and herbal remedies. They will need to check for any interactions.

If you are taking any of the medicines below, you may need to have extra blood tests to ensure the other medicines are working and not causing any side effects. The doses of these medicines may also need to be adjusted.

#### **Theophylline and aminophylline**

Azithromycin can increase the levels of these medicines in your blood, so you may need extra monitoring with bloods.

#### **Warfarin**

Azithromycin can increase the blood levels of this medicine. Extra monitoring of bloods may be needed, especially when azithromycin is first started.

#### **Digoxin**

Azithromycin can increase the blood levels of this medicine. Extra monitoring of bloods may be needed, especially when azithromycin is first started.

## Patient Information

### Statins

Azithromycin can interact with these drugs. Look out for signs and symptoms of muscle aches, pains, or weakness. Report these symptoms to your GP if they happen.

### If you have an exacerbation of COPD whilst on azithromycin

Although azithromycin is an antibiotic, you'll still need to take other antibiotics for any chest infections or exacerbations.

You do not need to stop your azithromycin whilst taking additional antibiotics. Continue taking these to schedule.

### Can I drink alcohol whilst taking azithromycin?

Yes, alcohol doesn't affect azithromycin.

### Record of exacerbations 'flare-ups' since starting azithromycin:

Date	Symptoms	Treatment	Comments

### More information

If you have any other questions, please speak to the specialist doctor or nurse who prescribed you the azithromycin.

## Patient Information

### Contact details

Community COPD service

024 7696 4167

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us on 024 7696 4167 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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#### Document History

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