



**North Tees and Hartlepool**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Azithromycin for Chronic Lung disease**

## **Information for patients**

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet is for those patients whose chest doctor wishes them to start a long term trial of the medication called Azithromycin

## **Why have I been prescribed Azithromycin treatment?**

You have been prescribed Azithromycin in order to try and improve control of your chest symptoms and also hopefully to reduce the number of chest infections you suffer.

It does this in two different ways:

- Anti-inflammatory – it appears to have an anti-inflammatory effect in the airways. Airway inflammation is a part of many lung conditions and appears to increase the chance of lung infections and also worsen symptoms such as cough, phlegm and breathlessness.
- Antibiotic – Azithromycin is an antibiotic and is capable of killing a number of the bugs (bacteria) that cause chest infections, however it is important to know that the dose being used here is much lower than the dose used to treat infections. If you develop an infection you may need to have more or different antibiotics.

## **What will happen before I start taking Azithromycin treatment?**

Your doctor will need to check a few things before you start treatment to make sure it is safe.

These will include:

- Sputum or “phlegm” samples – You will be asked to provide samples of your sputum. These will be used to check that there is no evidence that certain bugs are living in your lungs.

- An ECG or “heart tracing” – very occasionally Azithromycin can upset the conduction of electricity through your heart muscle. It is important to make sure that the electrical conduction is normal in your heart before starting treatment.
- Blood tests – this treatment should be avoided in patients who have severe liver or kidney problems. These blood tests will be checked before treatment to make sure it’s safe to start.

## **What dose will I take of Azithromycin treatment?**

The usual dose you will be asked to take is 1 tablet or capsule (250mg strength) 3 times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Occasionally the dose may be increased to 500mg strength 3 times a week depending on whether your doctor feels you may benefit from a higher dose.

## **What side effects could I have from Azithromycin treatment?**

Although some of the side effects which you are told about sound frightening it is important to remember that most people are able to continue with this treatment without side effects.

The main side effects can include:

- Stomach upset – About 1 patient in every 10 will have tummy upset, diarrhoea, constipation. These side effects will not cause any permanent problems and will improve if you stop the medicine.
- Sunburn or rash – Azithromycin can make you more prone to sunburn. We recommend using sun block on hot sunny days or when on holiday. About 1 patient in every 10 may also develop a rash.

- Liver inflammation - very occasionally this treatment can upset the liver and we routinely ask your GP to check liver blood tests about 1 month and 3 months after starting treatment to check for this. We will check your liver blood tests every 6 months if you stay on the treatment long term.
- **Extremely rarely:** If you or your relatives notice any change in your hearing you should stop the treatment immediately and report this to your doctor. One of the first symptoms can be tinnitus (ringing in your ears). Your hearing will usually then improve but a very small number of patients may have permanent hearing loss.

## **What if I forget to take my Azithromycin treatment?**

Don't worry, there is no cause for concern and you should just take your next dose as planned.

## **How long will I be on Azithromycin treatment?**

Everyone is different but this is usually 4 - 6 months before we can tell if it is working. If it improves your symptoms or it reduces the number of chest infections you have we usually like to keep it going and we have had some patients take this treatment for several years.

## **Can Azithromycin treatment react with any of my other medicines?**

Azithromycin can react with certain medicines. If you are taking any of these drugs, you can still be prescribed Azithromycin but you may require additional blood tests and the doses of these drugs may need to be adjusted.

- Theophylline tablets which are used to treat other airway

conditions by increasing the blood levels of this drug, this can cause side effects. The trade names of this drug are; **Uniphyllin, Slo-Phyllin, Nuelin SA and Phyllocontin.**

- Warfarin and the heart drug Digoxin

## **Can I still take Azithromycin if I need an operation?**

You do not have to stop taking your tablets before an operation. If in doubt, check with your chest consultant and the consultant who is doing the operation. Unless there are concerns we are usually keen to continue treatment.

## **Can this treatment affect my fertility or pregnancy?**

Azithromycin has no known effects on fertility. At present it isn't known if there are any potential problems if it's taken during pregnancy. The manufacturers suggest that it only be used if there are no other alternatives. As a precaution we highly recommend effective contraception for women taking Azithromycin.

## **Can I drink alcohol when taking Azithromycin treatment?**

Yes, there isn't any known evidence of problems.

## **What if I suffer a chest (or any other) infection while taking this treatment?**

You may still suffer from infections or flare ups of your chest condition while taking this treatment. We would still like you to get antibiotic therapy (if your doctor wishes you to have it) in the usual way.

We may ask you to stop Azithromycin treatment while you are taking other antibiotics and then restart them after you have finished.

## **Contact Numbers**

### **University Hospital of North Tees Lung Health**

Telephone: 01642 624270

### **Department of Respiratory Medicine**

Telephone: 01642 624936

### **Emergency Department**

Telephone: 01642 382899

24 hours a day, 7 days a week



This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: [patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk)

## **Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints**

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719

Monday – Friday, 9.00am – 4.00pm

Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084

Email: [patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk)

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30pm – 4.30pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

## **Data Protection and use of patient information**

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: [information.governance@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:information.governance@nth.nhs.uk)

University Hospital of North Tees, Hardwick, Stockton-on-Tees. TS19 8PE

University Hospital of Hartlepool, Holdforth Road, Hartlepool. TS24 9AH

Telephone: 01642 617617

Fax: 01642 624089