

TUBERCULOSIS

- Tuberculosis or 'TB' is an infectious disease caused by a germ or bug (bacterium) called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. This bug usually affects the lungs but may involve any organ and may infect anyone at any age
- TB is a condition for which there is very effective therapy that will result in cure from this disease, provided that a complete course of treatment is taken
- When TB treatment is not taken, it can result in death - TB causes about 2 million deaths per year worldwide, mostly in developing nations

How is TB acquired?

- TB is a contagious or infectious disease that is spread from person-to-person., usually by inhaling the bug from someone with the active disease who coughs
- Breathing in the TB bug does not necessarily result in 'active' disease, as the immune system is usually able to control the disease – only about 10% of people who have the TB bug actually develop 'active' disease during their lives
- In patients who have evidence of TB that is not 'active', a course of treatment prevents the development of 'active' TB at a later date

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms of 'active' TB include:
 - Cough or phlegm (sputum), sometimes with blood
 - Fever or night sweats
 - Loss of appetite and weight loss
 - Energy loss

How is it diagnosed?

- Your doctor will be interested in several primary factors:
 1. Symptoms
 2. History of any possible exposure, including emigration from a developing nation or recent travel to third world or other countries with a high incidence of TB
 3. Chest X-Ray
 4. Sputum test

How is it treated?

- The treatment of TB is generally very effective and results in cure of the disease
 - Problems generally arise only in people who have not finished their course of therapy appropriately
 - In people who fail to take medications properly, there is a risk of developing 'drug-resistant' TB, which is much more difficult to treat a second time as the bugs often become resistant to usual medications
- Treatment generally takes at least 6 months, and involves a combination of at 2 to 4 medications – this is very important as no single medication will kill all of the bugs
- If TB medications are not taken regularly, serious (**life-threatening**) complications may occur, including failure to treat the TB, drug-resistant TB and side effects of treatment.
- In most cases, the first few days of treatment are started in hospital, until the person's infectiousness has passed
- During the 6 month treatment course, the patient is seen at least every month to ensure that treatment is progressing satisfactorily, there are no side effects of treatment, and to provide medications
- In some cases, patients may be placed on a programme that involves home visits by nurses 2 to 5 times per week to ensure that there are no problems with treatment

Are there side effects of the treatment?

- A small proportion of patients may develop side effects with treatment, and your doctor will carefully monitor you for these
- ***If you develop side effects of treatment, it is vitally important that you consult a doctor immediately***
 - you should not stop treatment without speaking to your doctor
 - it may be necessary to change some of your medications, however it is important that you receive continuing treatment of some type
- Side effects that may be related to common medications include:
 - Isoniazid – liver toxicity, tingling/ numbness in fingers or toes
 - Rifampicin – liver toxicity, orange discolouration of urine and tears, interference with effectiveness of many other medications (including the contraceptive pill)
 - Ethambutol – Reduction in colour vision/ eyesight
 - Pyrazinamide – Nausea, liver toxicity, gout

Am I contagious?

- Patients with TB are often 'contagious' until treatment for TB has been taken for several days – for this reason, most people with lung TB are admitted to hospital and placed in isolation until they have completed several days of treatment
- Once you have received initial treatment in the hospital and been discharged home, there is very little risk of you being 'contagious'

Remember

- TB can be cured in most cases with a 6 month course of therapy
- Failure to complete a course of TB therapy can result in severe illness and even death
- If you develop side effects from therapy it is imperative that you consult your doctor immediately

To have successful tuberculosis treatment:
Stop smoking
Complete the full treatment course
(Not finishing the full course of treatment may even result in death)
Consult your doctor immediately if you develop side effects