

# Azithromycin

## (Used to reduce inflammation and infections in the lungs)

If you need this leaflet in a different language or accessible format please speak to a member of staff who can arrange it for you.

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Dacă aveți nevoie de această broșură într-o altă limbă sau într-un format accesibil, vă rog să discutați cu un membru al personalului să se ocupe de acest lucru pentru dumneavoastră

如果您需要本传单的其他语言版本或无障碍格式，请联系工作人员为您安排。

إذا احتجت إلى هذه النشرة بلغة أخرى، أو بتنسيق يسهل الوصول إليه، يرجى التحدث إلى أحد الموظفين لترتيب ذلك لك.

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## What is Azithromycin?

Azithromycin is an antibiotic. Antibiotics are used to treat infections caused by bacteria and are usually given as a short course for **1 – 2 weeks** and then stopped.

However, it has been found that for patients with chest conditions such as yours, taking this medication as a continuous treatment can at times control and improve your chest symptoms.

### How does it work?

#### Azithromycin works in two different ways:

1. Reduces inflammation in the airways which helps to reduce the amount of infections you get.
2. As an antibiotic to kill many of the bacteria that cause chest infections.

Although this drug is now commonly used continuously for patients with chest conditions such as yours, you need to be aware that it is not licensed for this purpose.

**This means that the drug is used 'Off License'.**

## Further information

**You may be able to get further advice from:**

#### **Asthma and Lung UK helpline**

Tel: 0300 222 5800

Email: [helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk](mailto:helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk)

Alternatively you can write to them at:

Asthma + Lung UK,  
The White Chapel Building,  
10 Whitechapel High Street,  
London.  
E1 8QS.

## Further information

If you need any further advice or information about your medication please contact your GP or the Respiratory Nurse Specialists within the hospital.

If required, they can discuss any queries you may have with your hospital consultant.

### **Respiratory Nurse Specialists**

**0151 290 4236**

### **Community COPD Nurse Specialists**

**0151 430 1553**

## What does 'Off License' mean?

Drugs must have a license from the Medicines Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) which proves that the drug works and that it is safe to use (based on clinical trials).

### **The license must state:**

- Which illness the medication can be used for
- What dose can be used
- How it should be given
- All possible side effects.

Sometimes medicines are used for conditions other than those they were originally licensed for.

### **This is described as being 'Off License'.**

- There are lots of drugs used safely within hospitals that are classed as 'Off License'
- Patients must be informed if a drug that is recommended to treat their illness is 'Off License'
- Patients must decide for themselves if they wish to take the medication or not.

It is important to understand that if your doctor prescribes a medicine for you that is 'Off License', it is because they believe the benefit of taking the medication will be greater than the risk of not offering you a treatment that could help control your illness.

## Before taking Azithromycin

Prior to being commenced on Azithromycin a recording of your heart (ECG) and blood tests to check your kidney and liver function will be performed, however it is important to inform your doctor if you:

- Are allergic to Azithromycin or other macrolide antibiotics, such as Erythromycin or Clarithromycin.
- Suffer from liver or kidney problems.
- Have any heart conditions, particularly heart rhythm problems.
- Are taking medication to treat migraines or depression as some should not be taken with Azithromycin.
- If you are pregnant, trying for a baby or breastfeeding.
- If you have Myasthenia Gravis.
- Are taking any other medication.

## How you should take Azithromycin?

- The usual dose is 250mg once a day. However, this dose may be different for some people. If necessary, additional instructions will be provided by your Respiratory Consultant (Chest Doctor) or your GP (Family Doctor).

You should take Azithromycin on an empty stomach either:

- 1 hour before a meal or 2 hours after a meal.
- **Do not** take any indigestion remedies **during the 2 hours before and after** you take Azithromycin as they will affect how the medication works.

## Important additional advice

- Although Azithromycin is an antibiotic, you will still need to take an additional course of antibiotics for flare ups or chest infections in the way you would normally.
- You **do not** need to stop taking your Azithromycin when taking another course of antibiotics. However, if you do require a course of antibiotics similar ones to Azithromycin, such as Erythromycin and Clarithromycin, **should be avoided** as the risks of side effects could be increased.
- You will need to have blood tests before you start your treatment and then every **6-12 months** to monitor your liver function. This will be arranged when you attend clinic appointments or through your GP.
- Although your first prescription for your medication will be given to you by the hospital, we will write to your GP to request that they provide additional prescriptions. If your GP is unwilling to prescribe your medication then arrangements will be made for it to be provided by the hospital.
- There is a very small risk of developing chest infections that common antibiotics will not treat effectively.

You should attend your nearest Accident and Emergency Department if you have any signs of an allergic reaction to Azithromycin, which could include:

- Hives, rashes or skin blistering
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Swelling of the face, lips, tongue or throat.

You should also stop using Azithromycin and contact your doctor immediately if you have any of the following side effects:

- Diarrhoea that is watery or bloody
- Chest pain or irregular heart beats
- Severe skin reactions
- Yellowing of skin or eyes (jaundice).

- You should just take one dose when it is due next.
- **Do not** take two tablets when the next dose is due.

### Is it safe to drink alcohol with Azithromycin?

Yes, it is safe to drink alcohol with Azithromycin, however any alcohol should be taken in moderation.

### How long will I need to take this?

Patients are normally closely monitored for the first 3 - 6 months. We will continue with the drug for as long as possible if:

- The number of infections that you suffer is reduced.
- Other symptoms such as coughing, sputum production or breathlessness is reduced.
- You do not suffer too many side effects.

### Should Azithromycin be stopped for surgery?

You do not have to stop taking your tablets prior to surgery. If in doubt, check with your Respiratory Consultant or the Surgical Team.

### Does Azithromycin alter fertility or pregnancy?

Azithromycin has no known consequences for fertility. Its safety in pregnancy is not fully known, and the manufacturers of the drug suggest only using it if there are no alternatives. We therefore recommend effective contraception for women on Azithromycin.

## Can Azithromycin be taken with other medicines?

Yes, but if you are taking any of the medications listed below you should inform your doctor **before** you take Azithromycin:

- **Warfarin** (Blood thinning drugs).
- **Digoxin** (Used to treat heart problems).
- **Ciclosporin** (also known as Neoral, Sandimmun, which is used to suppress the body's immune system).
- **Theophylline tablets** (also known as Uniphyllin, Slo-Phyllin, Phyllocontin - which is used to help with breathlessness).

Azithromycin can sometimes interact with blood levels when using these drugs and initially they may need to be monitored more frequently. The doses of these drugs may need to be adjusted accordingly.

### You should also inform your doctor if you are taking:

- Colchicine (used to treat gout).
- Edoxaban (used to treat or prevent harmful blood clots).
- Ticagrelor (used to prevent blood clots forming in blood vessels).
- Topotecan (used to treat tumours).
- Antibiotics for any other condition.
- Domperidone - as this may cause heart rhythm problems.
- Indigestion remedies.
- Antidepressants.
- Tablets for migraine.

## What are the side effects?

**Your medication will come with a very detailed information leaflet.**

**This leaflet will tell you a lot more about the drug and will list all the possible side effects.**

**You should read this carefully before taking the medicine and discuss any concerns with your doctor.**

Azithromycin, like all medicines can cause unwanted side effects, although not everyone experiences them. Many people find that as their body adjusts to the new medicine the side effects settle down. If any of the side effects continue or become troublesome, discuss it with your doctor as the medication may have to be stopped.

### Common side effects:

- Stomach pains, feeling sick or being sick, diarrhoea, wind and indigestion.
- Dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy.
- Changes in the way things taste and smell.

### Uncommon side effects:

- Poor hearing or ringing in the ears (Tinnitus).
- Deafness (hearing will usually improve when the drug is stopped).
- Changes in your liver function blood results.

Your blood will be tested routinely to check that your liver is not being affected by the drug.