

What You Need to Know About

TB Infection

TUBERCULOSIS



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for HIV/AIDS,
Viral Hepatitis, STD, and
TB Prevention



What's Inside:

Take steps to make sure TB infection does not turn into TB disease. Read this booklet to learn how you can take control of your health.

3
PAGE

What it means to have TB infection

5
PAGE

About the TB skin test

7
PAGE

Treatment for TB infection

10
PAGE

Tips to stay on your medicine routine

11
PAGE

Get your questions answered



“I just found out I have TB infection. I was relieved to find out that TB infection means I have only dormant TB germs in my body. This means the TB germs are sleeping, so they are not making me sick, and I cannot pass them to anyone else. My doctor told me that sometimes the TB germs wake-up and multiply. This is called TB disease, and if I get it, I can become very sick and can pass TB germs to others. I don't want that to happen, so I'm doing what my doctor told me, and starting on the TB medicine right away.”

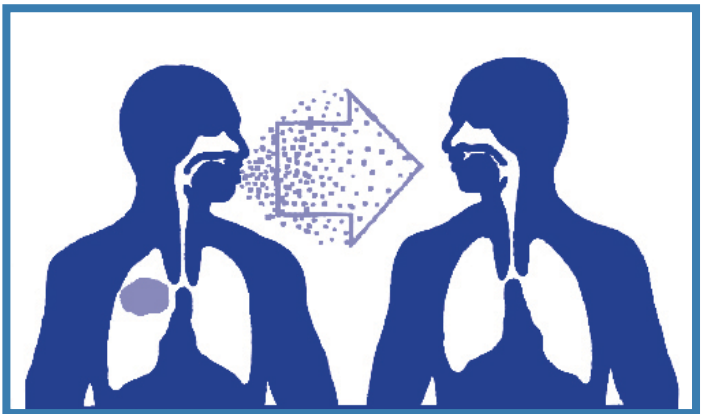
–Eddie

Eddie has TB infection. This means that:

- He has only dormant (sleeping) TB germs in his body, so the germs are not making him sick.
- He cannot pass these TB germs to others.
- Yet—if he doesn't take medicine to kill the TB germs now, he can get sick with TB disease in the future. And if he gets TB disease, he can pass TB germs to others.

How did I get TB infection?

- TB is spread through the air from one person to another. The TB germs are passed through the air when a person who is sick with TB disease coughs, laughs, sings, or sneezes.
- Like Eddie, if you breathe air that has TB germs, you may get TB infection.
- You will not know you have TB infection unless you have a TB skin test or TB blood test.
- If left untreated, TB infection can turn into TB disease.



TB germs are passed through the air when a person who is sick with TB disease coughs, laughs, sings, or sneezes.



You should have a TB skin test or TB blood test if:

- You have spent time with a person who has TB disease.
- You have HIV infection or another health problem, like diabetes, that makes it harder for your body to fight germs.
- You inject illegal drugs.
- Your doctor suggests you should be tested.
- Your workplace says you need to be tested.
- You are from a place where TB disease is more common. This includes most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Eastern parts of Europe, and Russia.
- You spend a lot of time where TB is more common. This includes homeless shelters, drug treatment centers, health care clinics, nursing homes, jails, or prisons.

Your healthcare provider said you have TB infection.

A person with TB infection will usually have a positive TB skin test or TB blood test. If your TB skin test or TB blood test is positive, your healthcare provider may also do a chest x-ray to look for signs of TB disease. If your x-ray did NOT show signs of TB disease, you will be diagnosed with TB infection.



Your healthcare provider may have also asked if you have HIV infection. That's because having HIV infection and TB infection together can make you very sick. If you don't know, ask your healthcare provider to give you an HIV test.

Take your pills the right way, as your healthcare provider tells you.



“At first, I could not understand why I had to be on the TB pills for 9 months. That seemed like a long time. And I didn’t even feel sick! But now I know that these TB germs are strong and they can take a long time to die. I made a plan to finish this medicine because I want to stay healthy for my family. I don’t want to take the chance of getting sick with TB disease someday.”

If you have TB infection, follow these good tips:

- Protect your health by taking medicine for TB infection.
- Take all your pills, even though you don't feel sick.
- Stay on the medicine to kill TB germs so you won't get TB disease.

Why should I take medicine if I don't feel sick?

Even though the TB germs in your body are dormant (sleeping), they are very strong. Many germs are killed shortly after you start taking your medicine, but some stay alive in your body a long time. It takes longer for them to die. As long as you have TB germs in your body, they can wake-up, multiply, and make you sick with TB disease. The only way to get rid of TB germs is by taking TB medicines. You will need to stay on TB medicine for 3, 6, or 9 months, depending on what your doctor thinks is best for you.

Talk to your healthcare provider if your medicine is making you feel sick.

Any medicine can cause side effects, including TB pills. Most people can take their TB medicine without any problems.



Call your healthcare provider right away if you have:

- Dizzy or lightheaded when sitting, standing or lying down.
- Less appetite, or no appetite for food.
- Stomach upset, nausea, or vomiting.
- Pain in your lower chest or heartburn.
- Flu-like symptoms with or without fever.
- Severe tiredness or weakness.
- Fevers or chills.
- Severe diarrhea or light colored stools (poop).
- Brown, tea-colored, or cola-colored urine.
- Skin or whites of your eyes appear yellow.
- Skin rash or itching.
- Bruises, or red and purple spots on your skin that you cannot explain.
- Nosebleeds, or bleeding from your gums or around your teeth.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain or tingling in your hands, arms and legs.

NOTE: People react differently to medicines. If you think you are having any reaction to your treatment, call the doctor right away.

Try these **tips** to help you remember to take your TB medicine.

Check off the tips you will try:

- Take your medicine at the same time everyday.
- Use a pillbox and put a week's worth of pills in the box.
- Keep your medicine in one place, where you can't miss it.
- Write yourself a note. Put it on your bathroom mirror or on your refrigerator.
- Wear a watch to keep track of time. Set your watch alarm for the time you need to take your pills.
- Ask a family member or friend to help you remember.
- Use a calendar to check off the days you have taken your medicine.

Your healthcare provider will make sure the medicine is working for you.

While on your TB medicine, you may see your healthcare provider at least one time a month. If you have other health problems, like HIV infection or hepatitis, you may need to see your healthcare provider more often.

You may also need to have some blood tests along the way to make sure your body is handling the medicine well.



Your questions answered here!

Here are answers to common questions from people who have TB infection.

Once I complete treatment for TB infection, does that mean I will not get TB disease?

The medicine does not work for everyone, but it works really well for most people. Most people who complete treatment for TB infection will not get TB disease.

After I finish treatment for TB infection, can I get TB infection again?

Yes. The treatment you receive for TB infection only treats the TB germs in your body now. There is the possibility that you can be around someone else with TB disease and get new TB germs. Yet—most healthy people won't need to be treated ever again.

I've heard that once I have a positive TB skin test, I will always have a positive TB skin test, even after I complete the treatment. Is this true?

Yes, this is true. Even after you finish taking all of your TB medicine, your TB skin test will still be positive. Ask your healthcare provider to give you a written record that says your test was positive and that you finished treatment. This will be helpful in case you are asked to have another TB skin test in the future.

What is the best way to explain my TB infection to my family, friends, classmates, or co-workers?

There is no right way or wrong way. Below are some suggestions, but do what feels right for you.

- Explain that people with TB infection cannot spread TB germs. In other words, no one can get TB germs from you.
- Explain that you are taking medicine to make sure you don't get TB disease.
- Share this booklet and information you have learned about TB infection with your friends, family, and others.
- Ask your healthcare provider any questions that you, your family, friends, classmates, or co-workers may have.

Get the facts on the BCG vaccine:

Some people from countries other than the United States have had the BCG vaccine for TB. The BCG vaccine will not always protect you from TB. Even if you had the BCG vaccine, you can still go on to get TB. If you have a positive TB skin test, your healthcare provider will decide if you need treatment for TB.

“I always thought that my BCG vaccine would cause my TB skin test to be positive. My healthcare provider said that some people who have had a BCG vaccine have positive TB skin tests and some have negative TB skin tests. I learned that a positive test often means a person has TB infection.”



Remember—TB can be prevented, treated, and cured.

All of this information is a lot to take in at once. Take each day—one day at a time as you work toward treating your TB infection.

Follow your plan to take TB medicine so you don't go on to get TB disease. Stay healthy for yourself, your friends, and your family!

Notes



**For more information on TB, call your
local health department at**

**or visit the CDC Division of
Tuberculosis Elimination website at
<http://www.cdc.gov/tb>**

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