



Gentamicin and Your Ears

Information for patients
Antimicrobial Management Committee



WHAT IS GENTAMICIN USED FOR?

Gentamicin is an antibiotic used to treat serious bacterial infections. Your doctor may decide to give you gentamicin instead of other more commonly used antibiotics because it will be the most effective antibiotic for the type of bacteria causing your infection, or because of any allergies that you may have to other antibiotics.

HOW IS GENTAMICIN GIVEN?

Gentamicin is given into a vein; it can be given via a drip or as an injection. For this reason gentamicin will usually be given to you by nurses in hospital. The dose of gentamicin given will depend on how serious the infection is, your age, body weight, height and how well your kidneys are working.

HOW CAN GENTAMICIN AFFECT MY EARS?

Like all medicines, gentamicin may occasionally have side effects. Gentamicin can occasionally cause damage to the ears. This may present itself as feeling dizzy or difficulty in keeping your balance, a ringing in your ears (“tinnitus”) or hearing loss. In some cases these effects may be irreversible.

It is difficult to estimate the risk of these effects occurring in individual patients as it depends on a number of factors. What is known is that the risk increases if your kidneys do not work very well or you are over 65 years old.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE THE CHANCE OF THIS HAPPENING?

If you are at risk of developing these problems we would ideally try to avoid using gentamicin to treat you, however in some serious infections this may not be possible. In this situation your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits of treatment with you.

The amount of gentamicin in your blood will be measured regularly to check that the correct concentrations have been achieved. In some cases your doctor may also carry out blood tests to check your kidney function before and during treatment with gentamicin.

If you are taking water tablets (“diuretics”) such as furosemide, your doctor may ask you to temporarily stop taking them whilst you are being treated with gentamicin. This is because they may increase the risk of gentamicin causing damage to your ears.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO?

It is important that you tell your doctor as soon as you notice the symptoms, if you are taking any other medicines, including over the counter medicines (bought from a pharmacy) or herbal remedies, because gentamicin can affect the action of some other medicines and vice-versa.

It is extremely important that you tell your doctor, ward pharmacist or nurse, straight away, if you experience any problems.

WHO CAN I SPEAK TO IF I HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

This leaflet has been produced specifically to provide information about the side effects that gentamicin may have on your ears. If you would like information about other side effects of gentamicin there is a patient information leaflet produced by the manufacturers which is available in each box of gentamicin. You can ask the nursing staff caring for you to give this leaflet to you. The manufacturer’s information leaflet is also available on the following website: **www.emc.medicines.org.uk**

The doctors caring for you will also be happy to answer any questions you may have. You can also ask to speak to one of the pharmacists or nurses caring for you.

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NHS Lanarkshire General
Enquiry Line: 0300 3030 243

NHS inform - The national health information service for Scotland.
www.nhsinform.co.uk
Tel No: 0800 22 44 88

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the NHS Lanarkshire General Enquiry Line on 0300 3030 243 or e-mail info@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk



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