

# Delayed prescriptions

**What are they, and how do they benefit patients?**



## What is a delayed prescription?

Your doctor or nurse has given you a prescription for an antibiotic, but has asked you to wait before taking it to the pharmacy (local chemist).

## Why have I been given this?

Your doctor or nurse has carefully considered your symptoms and has suggested that you might be suffering from an infection.

However it is difficult to be certain, from your symptoms alone, whether this infection is caused by a virus or by bacteria. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses.

Many mild bacterial infections can be cleared by your immune system alone without using antibiotics, so they aren't routinely prescribed.

However, on occasion your doctor or nurse may agree with you that an antibiotic could be used after a certain amount of time if chest or ear infections in children are not getting better as anticipated.

Alternatively, in some specific circumstances, a sample or swab may have been taken for testing in the laboratory. The laboratory test can identify the cause of your infection. This will help your doctor or nurse to decide whether or not you will benefit by taking a course of antibiotics, and which antibiotic to prescribe.

This is why you have been given a prescription, but have been asked to wait before doing anything with it.

Continued overleaf →

## So what happens now?

If your doctor or nurse has asked you to contact your surgery to get your results, you might be advised to do one of the following:

- take your 'delayed prescription' to the pharmacist to receive a course of antibiotics
- destroy the prescription you were previously given, because test results show that your infection is not caused by bacteria
- be given an alternative prescription, if your test results suggest this would be more effective

If you do receive a course of antibiotic, read the instructions carefully, and remember to take the complete course as advised, even though you may feel better before you have finished it. Your pharmacist can give you any further advice that you need.

If you have difficulty taking your medication, do speak to your pharmacist.

## Why shouldn't I take an antibiotic 'just in case'?

Your doctor or nurse will not prescribe antibiotics unless there is a real need.

There are two reasons why we should not use antibiotics unnecessarily:

- Using antibiotics too much, or using them when not needed (such as for a viral infection) encourages bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic. This means that the antibiotic will no longer be able to fight the bacteria. This could mean that in the future we will not have effective antibiotics available to fight potentially very serious bacterial infections.
- Antibiotics are powerful drugs, and can have unpleasant side effects such as vomiting, diarrhoea and skin rashes.

## How can I find out more?

Whether or not you are prescribed an antibiotic, there are ways to help relieve your symptoms.

To find out more about minor ailments, helping yourself, and over-the-counter remedies:

- talk to your local pharmacist (chemist)
- visit <https://www.nhsinform.scot/tests-and-treatments/medicines-and-medical-aids/types-of-medicine/antibiotics>