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Mersey and West Lancashire
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Co-trimoxazole

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What is Co-trimoxazole?

Co-trimoxazole is a type of antibiotic that is used to treat infections caused by certain bacteria. It is a combination of two different antibiotics called trimethoprim and sulfamethoxazole

When is Co-trimoxazole used for?

Co-trimoxazole can be used to treat infections including:

- Infections caused by bacteria
- A type of pneumonia known as PJP. PJP is a type of fungus that can infect the lungs. It is also known as Pneumocystis jirovecii (formally known as PCP or Pneumocystis carinii).
- Co-trimoxazole can also be used to help to prevent infections. This is known as prophylactic use.

You may be offered co-trimoxazole to prevent pneumonia caused by PJP. You may be offered co-trimoxazole if your immune system has become weakened for any reason or if you are taking medicines that stop your immune system from working as well.

How should I take them?

The dose prescribed will vary depending on the reason you have been prescribed the drug. Co-trimoxazole is usually taken twice a day every 12 hours, for example 8am and 8pm. Different doses are used to prevent infections (prophylactic use) and to treat PJP. Your doctor will advise you how much co-trimoxazole to take. Always take this medicine exactly as your doctor has told you.

Notes

Co-trimoxazole can cause an upset stomach. You may wish to take co-trimoxazole with food to reduce the chance of this happening.

Do I need to know anything before I take Co-trimoxazole?

Do not take co-trimoxazole if:

- You are allergic to sulfamethoxazole, trimethoprim or co-trimoxazole
- You have been diagnosed with a rare blood problem called porphyria which can affect skin and nervous system
- You are in the first trimester of pregnancy.

If you have any of the following medical conditions, only take co-trimoxazole if your doctor has specifically advised:

- You have a history of problems with your blood causing bleeding or bruising (thrombocytopenia)
- You have severe liver or kidney problems
- If you have a G6PD deficiency or predisposition to folate deficiency.

You should not take methotrexate and co-trimoxazole together as it can be dangerous. Methotrexate is a drug prescribed by specialist doctors to treat certain cancers and autoimmune conditions (such as rheumatoid arthritis and severe psoriasis). You should only take both medications together if you have been specifically advised to.

Are there any side effects?

Like all medications, co-trimoxazole can cause side effects. However, these will not affect everyone.

Common side effects include:

- Thrush (which can affect your mouth or vagina)
- Nausea
- Diarrhoea
- Rash.

Co-trimoxazole can make your skin more sensitive to light. You should wear sun cream and avoid sunbathing whilst taking these antibiotics.

Some rare side effects of co-trimoxazole can be very serious.

This includes the following:

Allergic reactions

You should stop taking co-trimoxazole immediately if you experience an allergic reaction. Chances of an allergic reaction are rare, and common symptoms include:

- Difficulty in breathing/shortness of breath
- Swelling of face, mouth, tongue and throat which may cause difficulty in swallowing
- Chest pain
- Red rash on skin
- Fainting.

You should seek medical help immediately and stop taking co-trimoxazole.

Bone marrow suppression

Sometimes co-trimoxazole can stop your bone marrow working properly so your blood cannot clot and fight infection. If you notice:

- A sore throat
- Unexplained bruising/bleeding
- A fever
- Feeling very tired.

Stop taking co-trimoxazole and tell your doctor – you will likely need urgent blood tests.

Will I require any monitoring?

Depending on how long you are taking co-trimoxazole for, you may need to have regular blood tests. These include tests to check your kidney and liver function. You will also need to have full blood counts (FBC) to check the amounts of different cells in your body to ensure you are not at an increased risk of infection. Your doctor will advise you on how often you need these tests.

Who can I speak to if I have any questions?

This information leaflet has been designed to give you some information about your treatment. If you would like some further information about co-trimoxazole there is a leaflet written by the manufacturers in every box of co-trimoxazole. An electronic copy of this leaflet is also available at www.medicines.org.uk. If you have any concerns or questions, please speak to your doctor or pharmacist who will be happy to help. Please remember that serious consequences are rare and there are many benefits to taking these medicines