

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is a disease caused by germs called bacteria that most often affect the lungs. You can be infected with TB when you breathe in the germs. You are at a higher risk to get TB if you have a weak immune system. This system can be weakened by poor diet, illness, medicines or other causes.

Signs

There are two types of TB infection, latent or active. Latent infection is when you may have no signs of TB. The bacteria are in your body, but they are not active. Active TB is when people have signs of the bacteria, such as:

- Cough that lasts more than 3 weeks or won't go away
- Fever
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Feeling weak and tired
- Chest pain
- Night sweats

Testing

A skin test will be done to see if you are infected. A positive test means that you have been infected. If your test is positive, your doctor may also use a blood test, a chest x-ray and sputum tests to see if you have TB. Your family members and others living with you will also be skin tested.

A negative test often means that you are not infected. The skin test may not react if you have a weak immune system. Your doctor may check for TB if your skin test is negative, but you still have signs.

Your Care

If you have a positive skin test or have TB, you will be started on medicines.

- Take your medicines as directed. You may need more than one type of medicine for TB. Some bacteria are resistant to some antibiotics. You need to take all of your medicines and not stop taking them, even if you feel better. You may have to take your medicines for 6 to 24 months. Stopping medicines early can cause the spread of TB to others.
- To protect others who do not have TB, cover your mouth when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Then, wash your hands. Always wash your hands before and after meals.
- To keep your body strong, eat 3 meals and drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid each day.
- Go to all doctor appointments.

If you are sick enough that you need to be in the hospital:

- You may be on respiratory isolation. This prevents others from getting TB.
- You will be isolated until you have been on TB medicines for 2 to 3 weeks or until your sputum is not infected.
- Anyone who comes into your room will wear a mask.
- The door to your room will be closed.
- You will need to wear a mask when you are out of your room.

Call your doctor right away if you:

- Have a worse cough.
- Cough up blood.
- Have trouble breathing.
- Lose weight even when you are eating a good diet.
- Have fevers or night sweats.
- Have brown urine or gray stools.
- Have yellow skin or yellow eyes.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.

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