

# Pyelonephritis (acute): antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

Published: 31 October 2018

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## Kidney infection: do I need antibiotics?

A kidney infection is usually caused by bacteria moving from the bladder into the kidney. One or both kidneys can be affected. Symptoms include feeling sick, feverish or weak and tired, and having a pain in the back or side. Although painful, a kidney infection usually gets better after about 2 weeks with antibiotics.

You should be offered antibiotics for a kidney infection because:

- The infection is caused by bacteria.
- If it's not treated it can damage the kidney.

You can also help your symptoms in other ways, for example, by taking a painkiller like paracetamol, or paracetamol and codeine for anyone aged over 12. It is also important to drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

Your doctor should explain that antibiotics can cause side effects, such as diarrhoea and nausea (feeling sick). However, vomiting can also be a sign that your kidney infection is getting worse. You should see your doctor if you don't start to feel better 2 days after you start antibiotics, or sooner if you start to feel worse.

Your doctor may refer you to hospital if you're pregnant, under 16 or you have a risk of complications.

## Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

The [NHS website](#) has more information about:

- [kidney infection](#) and
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the recommendations are based on the best research available.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-3125-5