

Treatment for Latent Tuberculosis Infection (LTBI)

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is Latent TB Infection (LTBI)?

Tuberculosis (TB) lives in the bodies of most infected people in an inactive form and does not cause any symptoms of disease. This condition is referred to as Latent TB Infection (LTBI). Persons with LTBI do not spread the disease to others. LTBI requires treatment with TB medications to prevent it from becoming active TB.

How is LTBI treated?

The good news is that there are effective medications available to treat LTBI and prevent development of active TB.

- Isoniazid (INH) and Rifapentine (RPT) weekly for 12 weeks OR
- INH daily for 9 months
- Rifampin (RIF) daily for 4 months

The single drug regimens are recommended if there is a serious drug-drug interaction or hypersensitivity to the other agent.

Are there side effects?

For INH, Rifapentine and Rifampin there are rare but serious side effects. Most people have no side effects at all.

- Stomach upset can occur especially with initial doses, but usually disappears after several doses. Take with a little food.
- Drug-induced hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) is uncommon in those 20 years old and under. Risk of hepatitis is higher in older populations, in pregnancy, among people with liver problems or regular alcohol use.

- It is recommended that you abstain from alcohol completely during your LTBI treatment because alcohol can increase the risk of hepatitis.
- The potential side effect of liver inflammation is usually reversible when the LTBI medicine is stopped.
- Your provider will order baseline blood tests at the start of LTBI treatment to make sure that your liver function is normal.

INH Facts/minor side effects

- Neuropathy (irritation of nerves) may rarely occur with INH, in less than 0.2% of people, causing numbness or tingling of the hands and feet.
- Neuropathy is more likely in people with underlying chronic conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease, and with frequent alcohol use.
- Your provider may recommend Vitamin B6 which helps to prevent this problem.

Rifampin/Rifapentine Facts/minor side effects

- May stain contact lenses permanently due to harmless orange color of body fluids (tears/saliva/sweat/urine)
- May cause loose stools/heartburn.
- May reduce effectiveness of hormonal contraceptive methods (birth control pills, progesterone only pills, Nuvaring, Patch, depo provera).

- May interact with many other medications, including but not limited to seizure medications, blood thinners, antidepressants, HIV drugs.
- **Inform your provider and pharmacist of all medicines that you take (including over-the-counter drugs, herbals and supplements) you take when starting LTBI medications, or if you start new medicine while on treatment for LTBI.**

What serious symptoms should I watch for while on LTBI medications?

- unusual fatigue or malaise greater than 3 days duration
- abdominal discomfort/pain, especially in the right upper abdomen
- nausea/vomiting
- unexplained fever, greater than 3 days duration
- itchy skin or rash
- unusual decrease in appetite or weight loss
- cola-colored urine
- pale, clay-colored stool or bloody diarrhea
- yellow skin/eyes
- joint aches
- severe tiredness or weakness
- persistent headache
- easy bleeding (gums/nose/cuts)
- easy bruisability

Additional serious symptoms with Rifampentine:

- pain in lower chest or severe heartburn
- flu like symptoms
- severe diarrhea
- persistent numbness tingling hands/feet
- shortness of breath
- feelings of sadness or depression

If ANY of the serious symptoms listed develop, stop LTBI medicine and call your RN/provider at Health Services as soon as possible. It is important to seek care early if any hepatitis symptoms might be developing. Your RN/provider will want to check

your blood liver enzymes and examine you as soon as possible.

What if I forget to take my LTBI medicine?

- If a dose is missed, tell your RN or health care provider at your next follow-up appointment. Do not take the extra dose as no more than one dose of LTBI medicines should be taken in a 24 hour period.
- If you have missed 2 weeks or more of daily LTBI treatment, call Health Services as soon as possible for an appointment.
- Do not “split” doses - your entire dose is taken once per day for all treatment regimens containing INH, Rifampentine or Rifampin.

How am I followed during my LTBI treatment?

- At Health Services, you will generally be required to have follow-up appointments with an RN (working together with your provider) every 1-2 months to make sure all is going well.
- You will receive reminders for LTBI re- visits.

What happens after I finish my LTBI treatment?

Once you have been treated for LTBI, there is no need to ever have another TB skin test (TST); once a TST is positive, it is positive for life.

- You do not need to repeat the IGRA test in the future either.
- When you complete a course of treatment for LTBI, Health Services will provide you with a card which documents your past history and your treatment.
- This documentation can be presented in the future to any agency or medical provider who may request TB screening, as an explanation for why you do not need a TB screen again.