Northern Territory Government

Centre for Disease Control

March 2015

Tuberculosis (TB) Treatment

Can TB be cured?

Yes. Today in almost all cases, ***TB can be cured.*** It is important to take the TB drugs regularly, on schedule and for the full duration of treatment.

Most people who have TB will begin treatment by taking at least 4 different types of tablets. After several months this may be reduced.

These tablets can cure TB if taken for at least 6 months. The tablets are given to the patient by direct supervision usually by a health care worker either on a daily basis or 3 times a week. It will depend on whether you have any underlying chronic illnesses and the type/site of TB.

Sometimes, TB germs are resistant. This means that the TB tablets that are most often used do not kill the TB germs. When this happens, combinations of other medications are given. Resistant TB is harder to cure and it takes more time to control, but most people with resistant TB can be treated. Your doctor will make sure specific tests are done to check for drug resistance.

Are TB medicines safe?

As with any medicines, TB tablets can sometimes cause side effects, although most people do not experience any problems. Tell your doctor or health care worker immediately if any unexplained illness develops or if any of the following symptoms occur:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Jaundice (Yellowish skin or eyes, dark urine)
- Unexplained fever or tiredness
- Tingling or numbness of hands or feet or joint pains
- Skin rash/itch, bruising
- Blurred vision or colour blindness to red/green colour.

It is important to tell your health care worker if you are taking any other medication especially oral contraceptives, diabetic tablets, anti-epileptic drugs, or anti-coagulation tablets so that drug interaction can be considered. Rifampicin (one of the TB drugs) causes discolouration of urine, sweat and tears to pink-orange. This is a normal reaction and causes no problem unless you wear contact lenses.

Why do I have to take the tablets for so long?

You have to make sure that the medicine gets to ***all*** the TB germs. Some of the germs may be killed when you start to take your medicine but it takes a long time for all of them to die.

I feel better! Why should I keep taking tablets?

Even after you feel well, do ***NOT*** stop taking your tablets. There are still many active TB germs in your body. If you stop taking your tablets, the germs that have not been killed will multiply and you can get sick again.

Drug resistant TB can develop when a person does not take the TB medication as prescribed. A person with untreated drug resistant TB of the lungs or throat can spread these drug resistant germs.

How should I take my tablets?

It is easier to remember to take your tablets if you take them at the same time each day. It is also best to take them on an empty stomach half an hour before meals or at bedtime (if you have someone to give you the tablets at that time). Centre for Disease Control staff will arrange to give your tablets as supervised doses, either daily on weekdays or Monday, Wednesday and Friday if taken 3 times per week.

If you miss tablets too many times the medicine will not work. You will need to keep taking the tablets until you have made up for all missed doses.

You should also:

- Take the tablets with milk, water or a glass of juice.
- Tell your doctor or health care worker about other medications you are taking (including birth control pills).
- **Avoid drinking alcohol while being treated for TB.** Alcohol increases the risk of serious liver problems if taken while on TB medication.
- Eat healthy food and get enough rest.

Monthly check-ups

While you are on TB medication, a monthly visit to the TB Clinic doctor is required. The purpose of this visit is to:

1. Check your weight and general health, ensure your sputum has cleared of germs and your chest X-ray is improving.
2. Make sure you are not having any side effects from the tablets.

How can I keep TB from spreading?

- The medicine will usually stop you from spreading the TB germs within a month or 2, if you take the tablets as directed. But remember, ***you are not yet cured***. The most important thing is to continue taking your tablets as prescribed until the doctor says you can stop.
- Always cover your mouth when you cough and sneeze.
- Tell all the people who you spend a lot of time with to contact the TB Clinic so that they can have a Mantoux test (tuberculin skin test). These could be family members, friends or co-workers.

Can I live as I always did?

If you have pulmonary (lung) TB or extensive disease, you may need to be admitted to hospital for the first weeks of treatment for TB. Your contacts and activities will initially be restricted until your doctor tells you that you are no longer infectious. In most cases this is only for a month or so.

When no longer infectious most patients with TB live at home and continue their normal activities. When you are no longer spreading TB germs, you can be near anyone, including children. You can continue your regular activities and return to work ***as long as you continue taking your medicine***.

For further information contact the TB Clinic in your region:

Alice Springs	8951 7548
Darwin	8922 8804
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0282
Tennant Creek	8962 4259

or www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc