

Fluoroquinolone Antibiotics: What you need to know about side effects

Information for Patients



What are fluoroquinolones and how are they used?

Fluoroquinolone antibiotics are a group of medicines that kill bacteria and fight infections. They include ciprofloxacin, moxifloxacin, ofloxacin and levofloxacin. These antibiotics are very effective in treating some infections where other antibiotics are not suitable. They should be used for the shortest possible time to treat your infection.

Am I likely to experience side effects from fluoroquinolones?

Like all medicines, fluoroquinolones may cause some side effects although not everybody gets them.

Very rarely, they have been reported to cause serious side effects involving tendons, muscles, joints and nerves. In a small proportion of patients these effects may lead to long-lasting or permanent disability. In addition, psychiatric reactions, such as confusion, disorientation, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts or suicidal attempts may occur.

Who is most at risk of experiencing side effects from fluoroquinolones?

Healthcare professionals will take special care if:

- you are older than 60 years of age
- your kidneys do not work well
- you have had an organ transplant
- you take, or expect to take, steroid medication, such as prednisolone or hydrocortisone

This is because these groups have a higher risk of these side effects.

- If you suffer from depression or psychosis, please tell your healthcare professional as this may become worse when taking a fluoroquinolone antibiotic.

You should stop taking fluoroquinolones and contact your local clinic immediately if you have the following signs of side effects:

- Tendon pain or swelling, often beginning in the ankle or calf; if this happens, rest the painful area until you can see your doctor.
- Pain in your joints or swelling in your shoulder, arms, or legs.
- Abnormal pain or sensations (such as persistent pins and needles, tingling, tickling, numbness, or burning), weakness in your body, especially in the legs or arms, or difficulty walking.
- Severe tiredness, depressed mood, thoughts of suicide or have attempted suicide, anxiety, or problems with your memory or severe problems sleeping. You may not notice some changes in your mood and behaviour so it is very important to tell your friends and family that you are taking these medicines, and that they have rare psychiatric side effects associated with them; others may notice changes and help you quickly identify any symptoms that you need to talk to your doctor about.
- Changes in, your vision, taste, smell, or hearing.

Tell your clinician if you have had one of the above effects during, or shortly after, taking a fluoroquinolone – this means you should avoid them in the future.

Other side effects that may occur include:

- Gastro-intestinal symptoms such as diarrhoea/loose stools
- Increased seizure activity in patients with a history of seizures or epilepsy. If you have a history of seizures, please discuss this with your healthcare professional before you start treatment.
- Cardiac symptoms in elderly patients. Symptoms can include chest pain, difficulty breathing, deep stomach pain, pulsating or discomfort, or changes to the voice.

If these symptoms occur, continue to take your medication and seek further advice from your doctor or pharmacist. Please note that the list of side effects above is not exhaustive; should you feel you are experiencing any other side effects associated with your treatment, please contact your local clinic.

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