

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

People with TB may have some or all of these signs:

- Cough
- Fever
- Weight loss
- Coughing up blood
- Feeling weak and tired
- Chest pain

Testing

A skin test will be done to see if you are infected. A positive test means that you have been infected by the germ. Your doctor will do 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. Take your medicines at the same time each day and do not stop taking them. You may have to take your medicines for 6-24 months. If you do not take your medicines, your TB may return and be harder to treat. You may also infect others if you do not take all of your medicines.
- Do not drink alcohol while on these medicines because the alcohol may cause liver problems.
- One of the medicines used to treat TB also may turn your urine and other body fluids orange.

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 2-3 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.

If you have a positive skin test or have TB:

- Cover your mouth when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Then, wash your hands.
- Wash your hands before meals.
- Eat 3 meals and drink 6-8 glasses of liquids each day.
- Go to all doctor appointments.

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.