

Your tuberculosis (TB) test was positive. Your next step is to have a chest x-ray to check for active disease. If you have a normal chest x-ray, then you have **inactive TB**, also called latent TB infection.

What is Latent TB infection?

Persons with latent TB infection are infected with tuberculosis, but do not have TB disease. They do not feel sick and do not have any symptoms. The only sign of TB infection is a positive reaction to the tuberculin skin test or TB blood test. We strongly recommend that individuals with inactive TB take medicine to prevent TB disease. This page answers frequently asked questions about treatment for inactive TB. **Please read.**

Can Bacillus Calmette–Guérin (BCG) vaccine cause a positive skin test?

Not for most people. If you received BCG vaccine before your fifth birthday, a positive skin test indicates TB infection. This is because the protective effects of BCG vaccine fade with time. However, adults who had many BCG vaccinations, or who were vaccinated after the age of 5 years, may have a positive TB skin test because of BCG.

Why should I take medicine if I'm not sick?

Inactive TB could become active at any time, especially if you have recently been infected (within the last 2 years), have chronic health problems or have a weakened immune system. Medicine can reduce the risk of developing TB disease and transmitting TB to others.

Why treat inactive TB infection? My doctor at home does not think it is necessary.

In parts of the world where TB is common, treatment for active TB is the primary focus. In the U.S., where TB is less common, public health efforts focus on treating people who have inactive TB to prevent them from developing TB disease.

What will happen if I do not take the medicine, or if I stop taking it?

You can become sick with TB disease and you can spread the bacteria to others.

What type of medicine is recommended and how would I take it?

There are 2 common medications used to treat latent TB: Rifampin and INH. Take your medications as recommended for maximum effect. Rifampin is the primary medication and is taken for 4 months. INH is an alternative medication. Take one pill daily for 6-9 months, along with a once daily B-6 vitamin.

What are the side effects of rifampin?

Notify your health care provider if you experience any of the following:

- Allergic reaction. this may include:
 - Itching or hives
 - Swelling in your face or hands
 - Swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat
 - Chest tightness
 - Trouble breathing
- Blistering, peeling, or red skin rash
- Bloody or very dark urine
- Blurred vision or eye pain
- Decrease in how much or how often you urinate
- Diarrhea that may contain blood

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Body aches
- Nausea, vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Pain in your upper stomach
- Numbness, pain, or tingling in your arms or legs
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Unsteadiness or weakness
- Unusual bleeding, bruising, or weakness
- Yellowing of your skin or the whites of your eyes

If you notice these less serious side effects, talk with your doctor:

- Diarrhea
- Heartburn
- Gas
- Stomach upset or cramps
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Headache
- Mild skin rash
- Muscle or joint pain

What are the side effects of INH?

Side effects are very rare. Among side effects, liver inflammation (hepatitis) is the major concern. It can be diagnosed with blood testing and the side effects are usually reversed when the medicine is stopped.

Notify your health care provider if you experience any of the following:

- Symptoms of allergic reaction such as rash, itching, swelling or difficulty breathing
- Upset stomach, heartburn, nausea or dizziness (These should resolve within a few days. Notify your clinician if they persist or worsen)
- Unexplained loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting
- Dark urine
- Yellowing of the skin, mucus membranes or eyes
- Persistent numbness and/or tingling sensations in the hands and feet (vitamin B-6 is recommended to prevent this)
- Abdominal (belly) pain (right upper area)
- Blurred vision
- Persistent fatigue, weakness or fever lasting greater than 3 days

If I am pregnant, should I still take the treatment?

INH is the preferred treatment for latent TB in pregnancy. If you are pregnant, your clinician will help weigh your options to see if the benefits of taking INH exceed the risks to your baby. Your clinician will advise you or arrange for you to consult with a specialist to decide whether INH is right for you.

What are costs of treatment?

The medicine is not expensive, although the exact price you will pay depends on your insurance.

Can my family members talk to my clinician about taking medicine before I begin?

Yes, your family members can talk to your clinician (with your permission), either in person or by phone.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: University Health Service (UHS)
Reviewers: Aimee Maslach MD

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 03/2021