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Patient information

Aminoglycoside antibiotics

Amikacin and gentamicin

- Information for patients on extended treatment with these antibiotics.
- Extended treatment: Greater than 7 days of standard dose aminoglycoside or greater than 14 days of lower dose gentamicin (in infective endocarditis).



What are aminoglycosides?

Gentamicin and amikacin are both antibiotics within the aminoglycoside group of medicines.

They are used commonly to treat serious bacterial infections. They are usually administered to patients via a cannula (tube) which is placed into a vein.

Patients receiving these antibiotics are usually inpatients.

Why do I need gentamicin or amikacin?

This antibiotic kills the bacteria (bug) causing an infection. It increases the chances of successful treatment of the infection.

In heart valve infections (endocarditis), antibiotic treatment is targeted towards the bug causing the infection (where it is known). Specific antibiotics are therefore necessary to treat the infection. The addition of gentamicin to your treatment can mean a shorter course of antibiotics is required, and increases the chances of successfully treating the infection.

Tolerability and side effects

Like all medicines, gentamicin and amikacin can cause side-effects, although not everybody gets them.

They are generally tolerated well by most patients. However, a minority of patients will develop significant side effects.

Gentamicin and amikacin can affect the kidneys which may require stopping these medicines.

Gentamicin and amikacin can affect the inner ear causing hearing and balance problems (occurs in less than 1 in 10,000 people, however prolonged exposure may increase the risk). If you have a history of hearing loss or balance problems or have any blood relatives with a history of this please tell the doctor. Also, if you experience new hearing loss, ringing in the ears, difficulty in maintaining or balance or dizziness (vertigo), please inform your doctor.

Some other side effects common to most antibiotics include feeling or being sick and diarrhoea. Aminoglycoside antibiotics have been known to occasionally cause purple skin discolouration, sore throat and mouth, fever, muscle weakness, confusion, tiredness, headaches, tremor, seizure and hallucinations. If you experience any of these or any other effects please let your doctor know.

The risk of side effects can increase with longer treatment courses. After two weeks of treatment, we will discuss the benefits and risks of a longer course of treatment based on your clinical progress. If longer treatment is beneficial, we will ask you to sign a consent form to allow us to continue treating you with aminoglycosides. Your doctor will explain why prolonged treatment is necessary.

Monitoring

We regularly check the levels of these drugs in your blood to make sure that the concentration is not too low or too high.

Gentamicin and amikacin can affect the kidneys, therefore we check your kidney function using a blood test regularly and if there is a decrease in kidney function, we may consider stopping the medication. We also monitor your blood counts and liver tests via blood tests whilst you are on the antibiotic.