

Delayed prescriptions

What are they, and how do they benefit patients?



What is a delayed prescription?

Your nurse has given you a prescription for an antibiotic, but has asked you to wait before taking it to the pharmacy (local chemist).

Why have I been given this?

Your nurse has carefully considered your symptoms and has suggested that you might be suffering from an infection.

However it is difficult to be certain, from your symptoms alone, whether this infection is caused by a virus or by bacteria. Antibiotics are not effective against viruses. That is why your nurse has taken a sample for testing in the laboratory.

The laboratory test can identify the cause of your infection. This will help your nurse to decide whether or not you will benefit by taking a course of antibiotics, and which antibiotic to prescribe.

This is why you have been given a prescription, but have been asked to wait until the results of your test are through before doing anything with it.

So what happens now?

Your nurse will send your sample to the laboratory at Foresterhill in Aberdeen. In the laboratory your sample will be tested to find out whether your infection is being caused by a virus, or by bacteria. If it is a bacterial infection, the laboratory will also be able to identify which kind of bacteria are causing the infection. The results of your test will be sent to your nurse.

The nurse will ask you to contact your surgery to get your results. Please agree with him/her the best time to phone. You might then be advised to do one of the following:

- take your 'delayed prescription' to the pharmacist to receive a course of antibiotics
- destroy the prescription you were previously given, because test results show that your infection is not caused by bacteria
- be given an alternative prescription, if your test results suggest this would be more effective

If you do receive a course of antibiotic, read the instructions carefully, and remember to take the complete course as your nurse advises, even though you may feel better before you have finished it. Your pharmacist can give you any further advice that you need.

If you have difficulty taking your medication, do tell your nurse or pharmacist.

Why might I not need an antibiotic?

The laboratory test may suggest that your infection is caused by a virus. Antibiotics do not work against viruses. Your nurse will ask you to destroy the prescription, and will give you advice, including how you can help to relieve your symptoms. He or she may suggest that you ask your local pharmacist about medicines that you can buy over-the-counter. Viral infections are unpleasant but you will probably be better in about a week.

If the laboratory test showed that you did have a bacterial infection, but your symptoms have now improved, your nurse might also advise that you do not need to use the prescription.

If your nurse advises that you do not need the prescription, please destroy it. Do not be tempted to keep it for another occasion - this might not be the right medication for any future infection.

Why shouldn't I take an antibiotic 'just in case'?

Nurses will not prescribe antibiotics unless there is a real need.

There are two reasons why we should not use antibiotics unnecessarily:

- Using antibiotics too much, or using them when not needed (such as for a viral infection) encourages bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic. This means that the antibiotic will no longer be able to fight the bacteria. This could mean that in the future we will not have effective antibiotics available to fight potentially very serious bacterial infections such as meningitis.
- Antibiotics are powerful drugs, and can have unpleasant side effects such as vomiting, diarrhoea and skin rashes.

How can I find out more?

Whether or not you are prescribed an antibiotic, there are ways to help relieve your symptoms.

To find out more about minor ailments, helping yourself, and over-the-counter remedies:

- ask your GP, or the nurses based at your practice
- talk to your local pharmacist (chemist)
- visit an NHS Grampian Healthpoint at:
 - > Aberdeen Indoor Market, 8-10 Market Street, Aberdeen
 - > Aberdeen Royal Infirmary
 - > Dr Gray's Hospital, Elgin
- call the free NHS Grampian Healthline on **0500 20 20 30**

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