

Allergy Information:

Antihistamine medication

Antihistamine medications block the effects of histamine in the body. They reduce allergic-type symptoms such as itching, sneezing, runny nose (rhinitis), watery eyes and urticaria (hives/nettle-rash) and skin swelling (angioedema).

Types of antihistamines:

This leaflet is mainly about antihistamines in tablets and syrups. Antihistamines are also found in some eye drops, nasal sprays and creams.

Tablets work just as fast as syrups, are cheaper and easier to carry with you. Most children from 6 years old can learn to swallow tablets (see resources at end of leaflet).

Antihistamines are sold under various brand names, so check the packet for the 'active ingredient' name. Non-branded versions will work just as well as more expensive brands.

Common 'non-drowsy' antihistamines:

- **Cetirizine:** also sold as 'Piriteze', 'Zirtek', 'Allacan', 'Benadryl Childrens'
- **Loratadine:** also sold as 'Clarityn Allergy'
- **Fexofenadine:** also sold as 'Allevia'
- **Acrivastine:** also sold as 'Benadryl Allergy Relief'

Common 'drowsy/sedating' antihistamines:

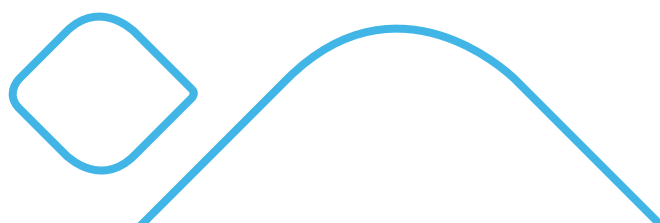
Drowsy antihistamines have more side effects so non-drowsy ones are generally preferred. Some of the drowsy antihistamines are mainly used for travel sickness rather than allergy. Others are sometimes used for itchy eczema at night as the drowsiness can help people sleep.

- Chlorphenamine: Also sold as 'Piriton', 'Allerief'
- Promethazine ('Phenagan'), Cinnarizine, Hydroxyzine and Alimemazine

Cetirizine

Cetirizine is the antihistamine most commonly recommended by the allergy clinic at the RUH. It is recommended because:

- It is a non-drowsy antihistamine and has few side effects.
- It starts working very quickly, just as fast as Chlorphenamine (usually within 20-40minutes).
- A dose keeps working for 12-24 hours.
- It can be used for all age groups; adults, children and babies.
- Research shows it is very safe for regular use, even in very young children.
- In some circumstances it can be safely used in higher doses than normal, if recommended by a health professional.



Dose regime for Cetirizine (standard doses used at RUH)

Age	Cetirizine Dose
Under 1 year	0.25mg/kg per dose up to twice daily as needed (up to 2.5mg per dose)
1 year – 5 years	2.5mg up to twice daily as required For more severe symptoms give 5mg as a single dose, or if symptoms continue another 2.5mg can be given within 24hours
6 - 12years	5mg up to twice daily as required. For more severe symptoms give 10mg as a single dose, or if symptoms continue another 5mg can be given within 24hours
12 years & over or adults	10mg once daily as required For more severe symptoms give 20mg as a single dose, or if symptoms continue another 10mg can be given within 24hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For some conditions, e.g. allergic rhinitis and recurrent urticaria, the doses can be given regularly every day.• The allergy clinic will sometimes prescribe higher doses of cetirizine or other non-drowsy antihistamine for specific reasons – please contact your health care team if you have any queries about the dose.	

Loratadine, Fexofenadine and Acrivastine

Other non-drowsy antihistamines such as **loratadine** or **fexofenadine** will suit some people better for conditions such as hay fever or recurrent urticaria (nettle-rash). They are even less likely to cause any drowsiness than cetirizine. They start to work more slowly than cetirizine, therefore are not quite as good for food allergic reactions or stings etc.

The dosing for loratadine is exactly the same as cetirizine. Fexofenadine doses are different so read the dosage instructions carefully.

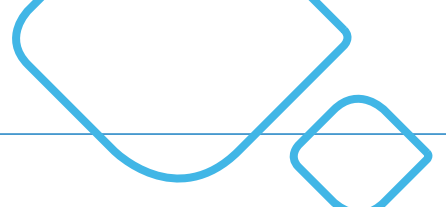
Acrivastine works quickly and is non-drowsy but wears off more quickly than cetirizine. It has mainly been used in adults.

Where to get antihistamines

Cetirizine and **loratadine** can be bought in shops and pharmacies for children from age 2 years. For children under 6 year olds you may need to ask at the pharmacy counter rather than get it 'off the shelf'. They can be prescribed by a medical professional for all ages.

Cetirizine and loratadine **tablets** are sometimes labelled as 'for over 12 years', but we often recommend tablets from 6 years rather than the syrups (e.g. use half a tablet for a 5mg dose)

Chlorphenamine can be bought from the pharmacy counter for over the age of 1 year.



Fexofenadine and acrivastine are in shops but only for those over the age of 12 years. They may be prescribed at younger ages, but are only as tablets.

All medications have to be licensed, which means how they can be sold and promoted. 'Unlicensed' preparations and dose regimes can still be advised if the doctor/nurse recommending them is happy it is the best option. There is more information about the licensing of medicines at: www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk

Schools and nurseries:

Current guidance from the Department for Education is that 'over the counter' antihistamines can be given in schools and nurseries. They do not need a doctor's prescription. The medicine/tablets must be in date, the instructions on the packet must be for the correct age-group and a parent/guardian must give written consent for the medicine to be given.

Other frequently asked questions:

Who should not take antihistamines?

- Doses of many anti-histamines may need to be reduced in liver disease, kidney failure or porphyria. Chlorphenamine (Piriton) is best avoided, or only used in low doses, in people with epilepsy, glaucoma or long QT syndrome. If you/your child is known to have any of these conditions check with your pharmacist or doctor before taking antihistamines.
- Do not drive, do any dangerous sports, or use machinery if you have taken a drowsy antihistamine or feel that other antihistamines have made you sleepy.
- Where possible the use of medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding should be minimised, but there is no evidence that cetirizine or loratadine cause harm so they can be used if symptoms require.

Are there any possible side-effects?

Non-drowsy antihistamines generally have very few side-effects, but occasionally people still feel sleepy, particularly if higher than normal doses are used. Fexofenadine is the least likely to cause drowsiness. People occasionally get headaches or a dry mouth with cetirizine or other antihistamines. Other side effects occur rarely. There is more information about possible side effects in the Patient Information Leaflet that comes with your medicine.

What if I / my child vomits after a dose of antihistamine?

If less than 30 minutes after a dose of antihistamine, repeat the same dose again. If more than 30 minutes after a dose of antihistamine, wait until the next dose is due.

Can other medicines be given at the same time as antihistamines?

It is safe to use eye drops, nasal sprays, creams etc containing antihistamines at the same time as antihistamines by mouth. You can take medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

Further Information

Allergy UK and Anaphylaxis UK are excellent sources of allergy information for all ages.
www.allergyuk.org www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

There are wide range of RUH leaflets about children's illnesses on the RUH website: www.ruh.nhs.uk/ChildrensLeaflets or scan QR code



Learn to swallow tablets/pills: There is an **RUH leaflet** on the website. We also recommend the video from University of Calgary which has a 2 week programme to do: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zxqs7flHJQc&t=3s> or the 'KidzMed' project: www.what0-18.nhs.uk/parentscarers/worried-your-child-unwell/teaching-your-child-swallow-tablets

Medicines in schools: www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/gp-practices/managing-workload/prescribing-over-the-counter-medicines-in-nurseries-and-schools

- This leaflet is intended to be used together with specific advice from a health professional.
- Please contact your GP, pharmacist or call 111 if you need further advice
- If you, or your child, is under follow-up with the paediatric allergy team at the RUH they can be contacted by email for non-urgent information: ruh-tr.childrensallergyclinic@nhs.net

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If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

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