

# Allergy Information: Antihistamine

## What are Antihistamines?

Antihistamine medication blocks the release of histamine, therefore either preventing or reducing allergic symptoms during an allergic reaction. Histamine is released from the cells, which causes allergic symptoms such as: urticaria (hives / nettle-rash), itch, vomiting, watery eyes, runny nose (rhinitis), swelling and sometimes more severe allergic symptoms.

## Common Antihistamines

Common antihistamines are;

- Cetirizine – also known as; Benadryl<sup>®</sup> Allergy, Piriteze<sup>®</sup> & Zirtek<sup>®</sup>
- Loratadine – also known as; Clarityn Allergy<sup>®</sup> or Clarityn Rapide Allergy<sup>®</sup>.
- Fexofenadine – also known as; Allevia<sup>®</sup> - now available to buy
- Chlorphenamine (Piriton<sup>®</sup>)

Any brand of antihistamine is acceptable to use, it does not have to be a specific branded product – supermarket versions will be just as effective.

## Cetirizine

The majority of children or young people who are seen in the RUH allergy clinic, the wards or Emergency Department with an allergy will be prescribed Cetirizine.

Cetirizine is a non-drowsy antihistamine & can be taken with or without food. It is recommended because:

- It has few side effects
- It starts working very quickly
- A dose keeps working for 12-24 hours
- There is research showing it is safe for long term use

## Other Antihistamines

Chlorphenamine (Piriton<sup>®</sup>) is familiar to many people. Although we can use this if required, cetirizine is preferable as chlorphenamine wears off quickly and can have

more side effects – particularly if used frequently. Cetirizine starts working just as fast as Chlorphenamine. The only antihistamine we can give via a drip is chlorphenamine.

Other non-drowsy antihistamines such as Loratidine or Fexofenadine will suit some people better for conditions such as hay fever or recurrent urticarial (nettle-rash). They start to work more slowly therefore are not suitable for food allergic reactions or stings etc.

### Standard doses of Cetirizine used at the RUH:

Age	Medication Dose
Under 1 year	0.25mg/kg per dose up to twice daily
1 year – 5 years	2.5mg up to twice daily (unless under 10kg then 0.25mg/kg) For severe allergic reactions give 5mg as a single dose If further doses are required another 2.5mg can be given within 24hours
6 - 12years	5mg up to twice daily For severe allergic reactions give 10mg as a single dose If further doses are required another 5mg can be given within 24hours
12 years & over and adults	10mg once daily The dose can be repeated once more within 24hrs if needed for severe or recurrent symptoms
<b>Most antihistamines come in syrup or tablet format – tablets work as quickly as syrups.</b>	

### Cetirizine licensing

Cetirizine can be bought in shops and pharmacies for children 6 years and over. It can be prescribed by a medical professional for any age and is known to be safe even in very young children.

The patient information leaflet for cetirizine may say 'not suitable for children less than 2 years'. This is because the drug company have not applied for a licence to promote cetirizine for use in children under 2 years, or to sell it without a prescription for under 6 year olds.

There is more information about the licensing of medicines at:

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)



### **When is cetirizine used?**

Cetirizine can be given regularly for conditions such as hay fever or recurrent urticaria or as a one-off dose/emergency medication for other allergic reactions.

If needed regularly try to take the medicine at about the same time each day so that this becomes part of your daily routine.

Some people are prescribed higher doses of cetirizine than normal due to their symptoms. This will be discussed with you if needed, and your GP will be informed of the dose you should take.

Cetirizine doses may have to be altered if you have kidney problems. Please inform your doctor if this applies to you.

### **When should the medicine start working?**

Cetirizine starts to work within 30 - 60 minutes after being taken. It then lasts for 12-24 hours.

### **What if I / my child vomit after a dose?**

Sometimes the allergic reaction will have caused vomiting

- If less than 30 minutes after a dose of cetirizine, repeat the same dose again.
- If more than 30 minutes after a dose of cetirizine, you do not need another dose. Wait until the next dose is due.
- If you continue to be unwell seek advice from your GP, pharmacist or hospital. They will decide what to do based on your condition

### **Can other medicines be given at the same time as cetirizine?**

You can have medicines that contain paracetamol or ibuprofen, unless your doctor has told you not to.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving any other medicines. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

### **Are there any possible side-effects?**

We use medicines to make us feel better, but sometimes they have effects that we don't want. Occasionally people feel drowsy or get headaches with cetirizine and other side effects occur very rarely.

There is more information about possible side effects of cetirizine in the Patient Information Leaflet which comes with your medicine, or the website

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)

## Who to contact for more information

Your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about antihistamines and about other medicines used to treat allergy.

## You can also get useful information from:

**England** - NHS 111: **call**; 111 - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Scotland** - NHS 24: **call**; 111 - [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

**Wales/Galw Lechyd Cymru** - NHS Direct: 0845 4647. [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

**Northern Ireland** - NI Direct: [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

**Allergy UK:** Helpline: 01322 619 898 - [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

**Anaphylaxis Campaign:** Helpline: 01252 542029 - [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/)

**Itchy Sneezy Wheezy:** [www.itchysneezywheezy.co.uk](http://www.itchysneezywheezy.co.uk)

**National Eczema Society:** Helpline 0800 089 1122 [www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org)

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.