

Title: Latent Tuberculosis and Risks of isoniazid therapy

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Abstract: Liver damage from isoniazid therapy for latent tuberculosis occurs in 5-10 people per 1000 patients. The risk is greatest in those over 35 years of age.

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LATENT TUBERCULOSIS

What is Tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is a disease that usually attacks the lungs but can affect almost any part of the body. A person infected with TB does not necessarily feel ill – and such cases are known as silent or “latent” infections. When the lung disease becomes “active”, the symptoms include cough that last for more than two or three weeks, weight loss, loss of appetite, fever, night sweats and coughing up blood.

What causes TB?

TB is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The bacterium can cause disease in any part of the body, but it normally enters the body through the lungs and resides there.

What is Latent TB?

Most people who become infected with TB are able to fight the bacteria and stop them from multiplying. In many of these people, the bacteria become dormant. This is called latent TB infection. People with latent TB infection usually have a positive skin test reaction, but have no symptoms.

Can someone with Latent TB spread the bacteria to others?

No, only persons with active tuberculosis can spread the bacteria to persons around them.

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If I have latent TB infection, how can I keep from developing active TB disease?

The medicine usually taken for the treatment of latent TB infection is called isoniazid (INH). INH kills the TB bacteria that are in the body. If you take your medicine as instructed by your doctor or nurse, it can keep you from developing active TB disease. Children and people with HIV infection may need to take INH for a longer time.

Because there are less bacteria in a person with latent TB infection, treatment is much easier. Usually, only one drug is needed to treat latent TB infection. A person with active TB disease has a large amount of TB bacteria in the body. Several drugs are needed to treat active TB disease.

Sometimes people are given treatment for latent TB infection even if their skin test reaction is not positive. This is often done with infants, children, and HIV-infected people who have recently spent time with someone with active TB disease. This is because they are at very high risk of developing active TB disease soon after they become infected with TB bacteria.

It is important that you take all the pills as prescribed. If you start taking INH, you will need to see your doctor or nurse on a regular schedule. He or she will check on how you are doing.

What are the risks of Latent TB therapy?

Some people have side effects from INH, the most serious of which is liver damage. A recent study reports that the liver damage occurs in 5-10 in

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