

# Pharmacology of Antibiotics: Folate Synthesis Inhibitors

Leslie Goldstein, Pharm.D.

Associate Professor

Department of Clinical Specialties

Pharmacology Division

[lgolds01@nyit.edu](mailto:lgolds01@nyit.edu)

**NEW YORK INSTITUTE  
OF TECHNOLOGY**

College of Osteopathic  
Medicine

Do.  
Make.  
Heal.  
Innovate.  
Reinvent the Future.



After completing the preparation materials, students should be able to:

1. Identify the sulfonamides' clinically relevant class and drug-specific pharmacokinetics properties.
2. Differentiate the mechanisms of action, resistance, and cross-resistance for the sulfonamides and trimethoprim.
3. Give examples of the therapeutic applications of each of the clinically used sulfonamides, trimethoprim, and trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX) in relation to their specific spectrums of activity.
4. Explain the mechanisms of potential adverse reactions and drug interactions for the sulfonamides and trimethoprim.
5. Correlate the common and potentially serious adverse effects of each subclass of antifolate antibiotics with their cautions and contraindications for use.

## Preparation Materials

### Required

- ScholarRx Bricks | Practice Questions and Clinical Vignettes

### Highly relevant optional materials:

- Dr. Goldstein's Word handout | Video lecture | Guided Reading Questions
- Textbook resources with links are listed on the next slide

### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- *Use the resources that work best for you.*
- *You do not need to study all of them.*
- *Work through the GUIDED READING QUESTIONS with pen/pencil and paper.*

*Try answering them in your OWN WORDS first without looking at the readings, and then again after reviewing.*

- *Practice questions (not graded): Simple Recall and Case Vignettes*

### ScholarRx:

Name of Discipline/ Organ System: General Microbiology > Antimicrobial Agents > Antibacterial Drugs

Title of Brick: Folate Synthesis Inhibitors

Link(s): <https://exchange.scholarrx.com/brick/sulfonamides-and-trimethoprim>

Access Medicine Katzung's Basic & Clinical Pharmacology, 16e, 2024; 46: Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3382&sectionid=281754915>

Access Medicine Katzung's Pharmacology Examination & Board Review, 14e, 2024; Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3461&sectionid=285598294>

LWW Health Library Premium Basic Sciences: Lippincott's Illustrated Reviews: Pharmacology, 8e, 2023; Chapter 31: Quinolones, Folic Acid Antagonists, and Urinary Tract Antiseptics > section on Quinolones

<https://premiumbasicsciences.lwwhealthlibrary.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?sectionid=253328879&bookid=3222>

Any current microbiology textbook

Key points: What you need to know and understand

**Sulfonamides:** Weak acids structurally similar to PABA

---

**PK:** Modest tissue penetration, hepatic metabolism via N-acetylation and CYP pathways, and excretion in urine of both intact drug (high concentration) and acetylated metabolites. Toxic metabolites of the CYP pathways may cause immunological toxicities and direct (non-immunological) toxicities.

---

**Action:** Dihydropteroate synthase (DHPS) inhibitors compete with the natural substrate, PABA, in first step of the bacterial folate synthase pathway. Folate is required for purine synthesis.

---

**Antibacterial effect:** Bacteriostatic

---

**Selective toxicity:** Mammalian cells use exogenous folic acid from dietary sources.

---

**Spectrum:** staphylococci (MSSA/MRSA), gram-negative aerobes, and *Nocardia*, and non-bacterial *Pneumocystis jirovecii*, *Toxoplasma gondii*

---

**Resistance:** *widespread resistance to common infective pathogens*

Decreased cellular accumulation of drug (decreased permeation or efflux); enhanced PABA production; modified target

Intrinsic resistance: Enterococci, PCN-resistant *S. pneumoniae*, *P. aeruginosa*, *Rickettsia*, anaerobes, spirochetes, *Mycoplasma*, Mycobacteria

### Sulfonamides

---

Sulfonamides are not used alone for the treatment of systemic infections due to resistance.

**Therapeutic uses:** Trimethoprim and sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX) fixed-combination for a variety of infections; malaria (sulfadoxine and pyrimethamine); toxoplasmosis (sulfadiazine and pyrimethamine); ulcerative colitis and rheumatoid arthritis (sulfasalazine);

Topical: antibacterial ophthalmic drops (sulfacetamide), burn creams/powder (silver sulfadiazine, mafenide acetate)

---

#### **Toxicities:**

- Hypersensitivity reactions with skin rash and fever are common. Severe Stevens-Johnson syndrome and exfoliative dermatitis are rare.
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are common. Hepatitis occurs rarely.
- Serious hematopoietic disturbances occur rarely – granulocytopenia, thrombocytopenia, and aplastic anemia. Acute hemolysis is a potential in individuals with glucose-6-phosphate-dehydrogenase deficiency.
- Crystalluria can result from sulfonamide precipitation in acidic urine.
- Displacement of unconjugated bilirubin on albumin binding sites can lead the kernicterus (encephalopathy) in neonates.
- HIV/AIDS patients have a high incidence of adverse effects. Poor acetylators are at increased risk of toxicities.

## Key points

**Trimethoprim:** Weak base structurally similar to folic acid

---

**PK:** Good tissue penetration, hepatic metabolism (CYP2C9), high concentrations of intact drug excreted in urine;  $t_{1/2}$  adults 8-12 hours (about the same as sulfamethoxazole that is combined with)

---

**Action:** Dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR) inhibitor that blocks the conversion of dihydrofolate to active tetrahydrofolate, the second step in bacterial folate synthesis.

---

**Antibacterial effect:** Bacteriostatic

---

**Selective toxicity:** Much greater affinity for bacterial DHFR than for mammalian DHFR

---

**Spectrum:** Streptococci, staphylococci, MRSA, gram-negative aerobic bacilli

***Widespread resistance***

---

**Resistance:** Production of DHFR with decreased affinity for the drug

---

**Therapeutic uses:** Rarely used alone. Clinical applications UTI prophylaxis and *Pneumocystis* pneumonia with dapsone (sulfone)

---

**Toxicities:** Megaloblastic anemia, leukopenia, granulocytopenia are predictable adverse effects resulting from inhibition of folate metabolism. Folic acid supplementation reduces these effects.



## Key points

**Trimethoprim-Sulfamethoxazole:** fixed combination for oral and IV administration

---

**PK:** Formulated in a 1:5 TMP:SMX ratio, which produces the optimal peak concentration of 1:20 TMP:SMX.

---

**Dual action:** By inhibiting DHPS and DHFR, the combination inhibits the first and second step in bacterial folate synthesis, which prevents the synthesis of DNA, RNA and proteins.

---

**Antibacterial effect:** Synergistic and bactericidal, broader spectrum than either agent alone

---

**Therapeutic uses:** TMP-SMX is effective in the treatment many infections caused by susceptible organisms:

---

- Urinary tract infections (*E. coli* resistance is common)
- Respiratory, ear, and sinus infections caused by *H. influenzae* and *M. catarrhalis*
- Alternative for Traveler's diarrhea, shigellosis, typhoid fever, MRSA and *Listeria* infections

**Drug of choice for:**

- Prevention and treatment of *Pneumocystis* pneumonia, which affects HIV/AIDS patients
- Nocardiosis, a disease affecting the brain, lungs, and skin – most common in people with weakened immune systems.



# Folate Synthesis Inhibitors

## Sulfonamides

## Sulfones

(sulfones are not included in this lecture)

## Trimethoprim

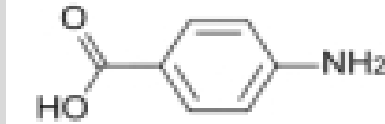
## Pyrimethamine

(not sulfonamides)

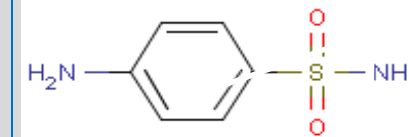
### Structure-activity relationship

Sulfur group linked to  
benzene ring and *para*-  
NH<sub>2</sub> required for activity

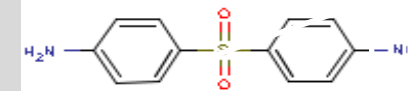
The sulfonamides and trimethoprim are rarely used alone. Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX, cotrimazole) fixed combination is frequently used if therapy with a folate synthesis inhibitor is appropriate.



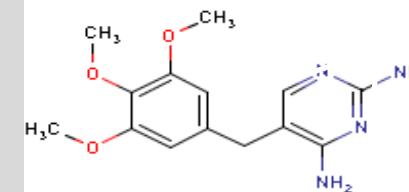
PABA



Sulfanilamide



Dapsone



Trimethoprim

SO<sub>2</sub>NH<sub>2</sub>  
sulfonamide

sulfone (S=S)

structural analog  
of dihydrofolate

## Sulfonamides Sub-classifications

*Sulfonamides have long been categorized by their pharmacokinetic properties:*

---

Agents that are absorbed and excreted rapidly

---

Agents that are poorly absorbed when administered orally and are active in the bowel lumen

---

Agents that are rapidly absorbed but excreted slowly (long-acting)

---

Agents that are used mainly topically

# Pharmacokinetic Properties of Folate Inhibitors

	Absorption	Distribution	Metabolism	Excretion	t½
Sulfisoxazole	Rapid	Protein binding to albumin: 20-90% depending on chemical characteristics of drug  Distributes in body tissues and fluids	Hepatic CYP2C9 and NAT2 (N-acetylation)	Glomerular filtration of unchanged drug and metabolites  Crystalluria: (precipitation in acidic urine) Patients should maintain adequate fluid intake.	5-6 hours
*Sulfamethoxazole	Rapid				11 hours
*Sulfadiazine	Rapid				10 hours
Sulfasalazine	Poor				Sulfapyridine ~8 h
*Sulfadoxine	Rapid				5-9 days
Sulfacetamide	Topical				
*Silver sulfadiazine *Mafenide acetate	Topical				
Dapsone	Rapid		CYP2C9, 3A4; acetylation		mean 30 hours (10-50 hours)
*Trimethoprim not a sulfonamide	Rapid	Protein binding: 45% fluids/tissues	CYP2C9, 3A4	Renal excretion mainly unchanged	8-12 hours
*TMP-SMX	1:5 ratio → C <sub>max</sub> in 1:20 ratio; t½ of the 2 drugs are similar				

TMP-SMX: trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole

# Metabolism of Sulfonamides

- N-acetylation and N-oxidation
- Reactive metabolites of CYP  
N-oxidation → hypersensitivity reactions

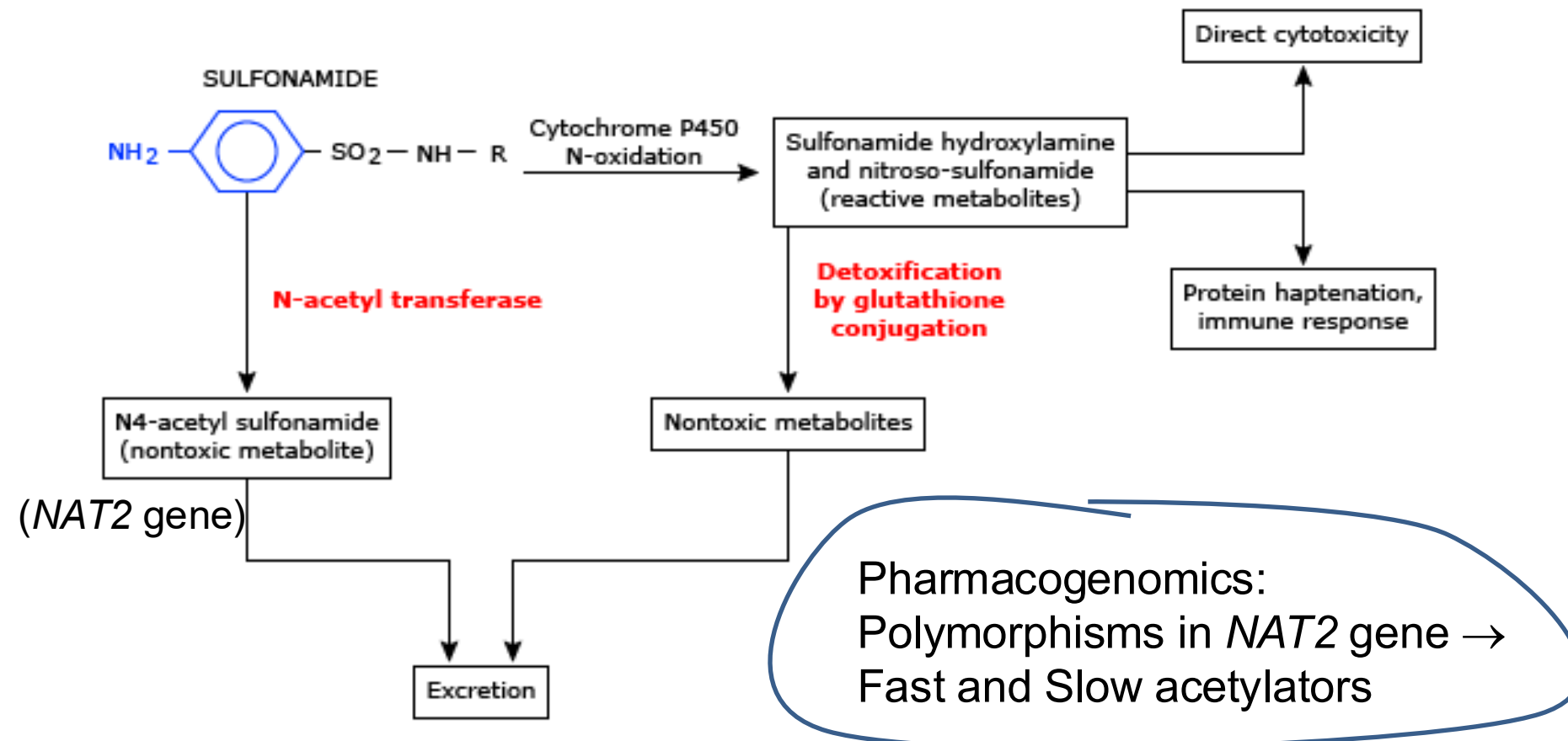
Risk factors:

1. Slow acetylators, and
2. Depleted glutathione stores (eg HIV/AIDS)



more prolonged exposure to the reactive metabolites → ↑ risk of hypersensitivity reactions

## Sulfonamide metabolic pathways



Sulfonamide antimicrobial drugs are metabolized by oxidation of the arylamine group (shown in blue). Nontoxic metabolites are then excreted. Factors that slow metabolism, such as slow acetylator status or depletion of glutathione stores (in HIV infection), can affect the steps shown in bold red. This may lead to prolonged exposure to reactive metabolites and increased rate of hypersensitivity reactions.

Modified with permission from: Solensky R. Drug desensitization. Immunol Allergy Clin North Am 2004; 24:425. Copyright © 2004 Elsevier Inc.

UpToDate®

From: **31 Quinolones, Folic Acid Antagonists, and Urinary Tract Antiseptics, Figure 31.7**

Lippincott® Illustrated Reviews: Pharmacology, 7e, 2019

## Inhibition of tetrahydrofolate synthesis by sulfonamides and trimethoprim.

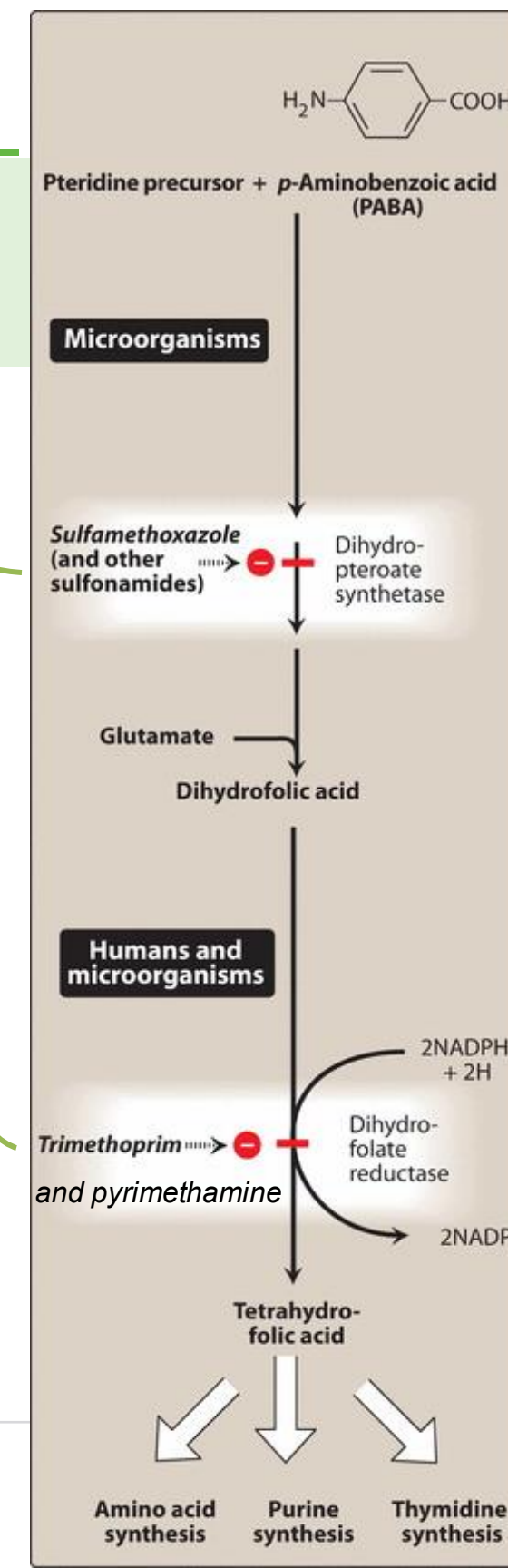
**Sulfonamides / sulfones** compete with p-aminobenzoic acid (PABA) for dihydropteroate synthase → prevents conversion of PABA to dihydrofolic acid

**Trimethoprim:** Inhibits dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR) → prevents conversion of dihydrofolic acid to active tetrahydrofolic acid

### Spectrum of activity: Trimethoprim-Sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX)

(sulfonamides are not used alone for systemic infections)

- many aerobic gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria
- non-bacteria *Pneumocystis jirovecii* and some protozoa
- caMRSA generally susceptible



## Acquired Resistance

### Widespread resistance limits use of folate synthesis inhibitors.

Plasmid transfer or random mutation under selective pressure:

1. Decreased intracellular concentration of drug
  - ↓ Cellular permeability to the drugs
  - Drug efflux
2. Increased PABA production → outcompetes the drug
3. Modified targets → low affinity for the drug
  - Altered dihydropteroate synthase (sulfonamides)
  - Altered dihydrofolate reductase (trimethoprim)

### Formerly susceptible but now resistant bacteria:

- *S. pneumoniae*
- Group A *Streptococcus*
- *N. gonorrhoeae*
- *N. meningitidis*

Increasing resistance

- *E. coli; Klebsiella*

### Intrinsic resistance:

Anaerobes, Enterococci, *P. aeruginosa*, spirochetes, Mycoplasma, Mycobacteria

Sulfonamides **STIMULATE** growth of *Rickettsia*.



# Therapeutic Uses of Sulfonamides

(Uses of TMP-SMX combination are listed after the section on trimethoprim.)

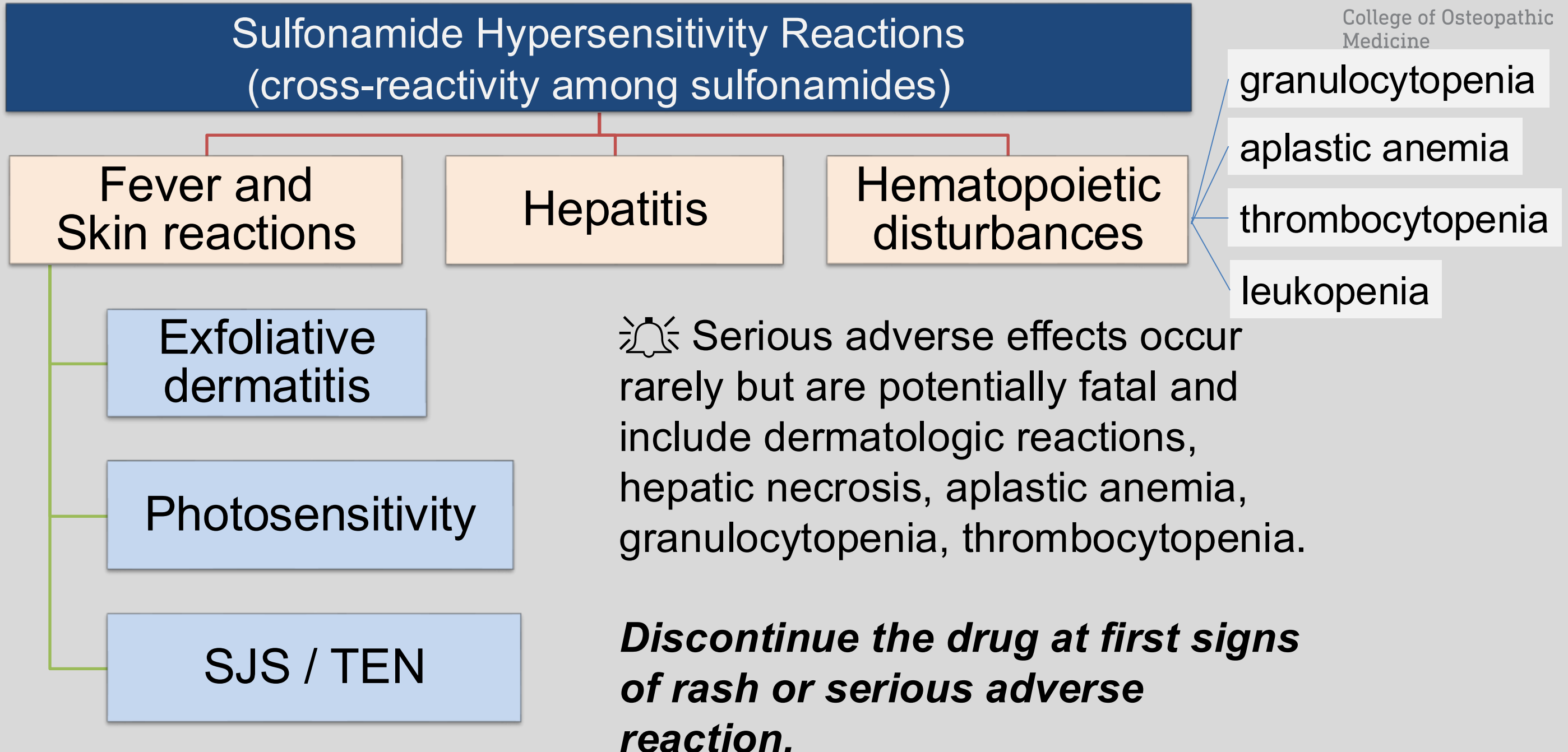
Sulfadiazine + pyrimethamine (+ leucovorin = active folate)	Acute toxoplasmosis first-line treatment	Pyrimethamine is a potent inhibitor of parasitic DHFR. It is combined with a sulfonamide for synergy.
Sulfadoxine + pyrimethamine (+ leucovorin)	<i>Plasmodium falciparum</i> malaria treatment (widespread resistance)	
Sulfasalazine	Inflammatory bowel disease; rheumatoid arthritis	

## Topical sulfonamides

Sulfacetamide sod.	Ophthalmic; dermatologic uses
Silver sulfadiazine minimal absorption	Burns Silver is slowly released → toxic to the bacteria.
Mafenide readily absorbed from burn area	Burns Causes intense pain on application Caution: Can cause <b>metabolic acidosis</b> (carbonic anhydrase inhibitor)



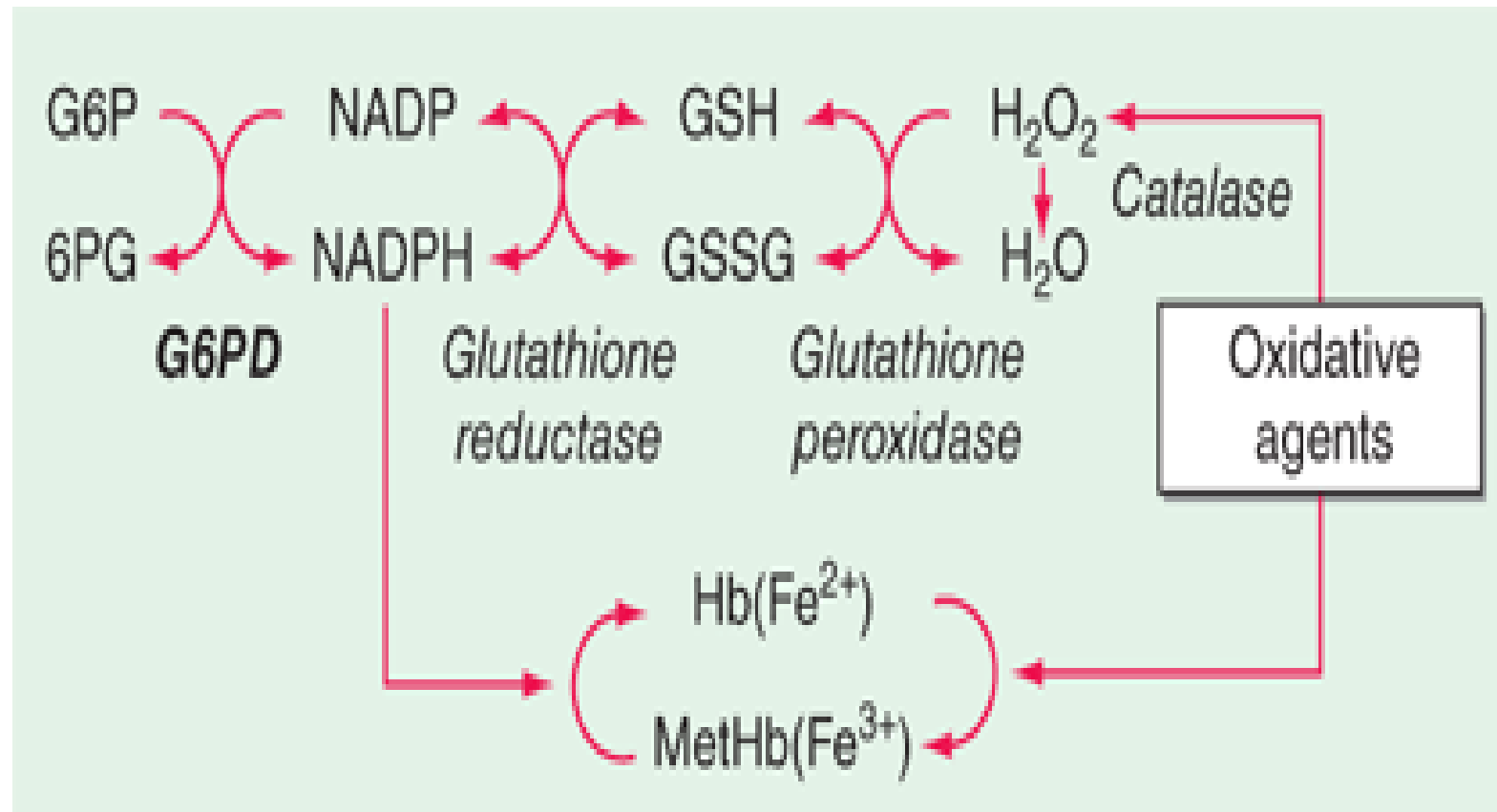
# Sulfonamides: Adverse Effects



## Sulfonamides: Cautious use in patients with...

Glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency	Hemolytic anemia (G6PD deficiency is a common X-linked disorder.)
Bone marrow suppression	Agranulocytosis; aplastic anemia More common in pts with limited reserve Use caution in patients with folate deficiency
Crystalluria risk factors High sulfonamide dose Acidic urine	Sulfadiazine and sulfamethoxazole may precipitate in acidic urine Practice point: Drink lots of water (all sulfa drugs)
Newborn infants	<b>Kernicterus</b> Sulfonamides displace bilirubin from albumin binding sites → ↑plasma levels of unconjugated bilirubin
Pregnancy / Lactation	Kernicterus concern: Avoid in LATE pregnancy Nursing is contraindicated for infants ≤2 months old
Plus like all ABX, they can cause <i>C. difficile</i> infection	Diarrhea; dehydration; pseudomembranous colitis; toxic megacolon

Erythrocytes are vulnerable to oxidative stress in patients with G6PD deficiency. Sulfonamides can induce oxidative stress by creating reactive oxygen species (ROS).



G6PD maintains the body's supply of reduced NADPH.

In red cells, G6PD is critical.

It is the only source of NADPH, which directly and via glutathione (GSH) defends these cells against oxidative stress.

G6PD deficiency makes red cells more vulnerable to oxidative stress.

NADPH is also necessary for reduction of methemoglobin to Hb(Fe<sup>2+</sup>). MetHb(Fe<sup>3+</sup>) is unable to bind oxygen.

Source: D. L. Kasper, A. S. Fauci, S. L. Hauser, D. L. Longo, J. L. Jameson, J. Loscalzo  
[www.accessmedicine.com](http://www.accessmedicine.com)

Copyright © McGraw-Hill Education. All rights reserved.

Solubility of the older sulfonamides is decreased in acidic urine.

- Crystals are more likely to form in acidic urine.
- Intratubular precipitation of crystals can lead to hematuria, obstruction, and acute kidney injury

### **Drug-drug interaction:**

\***Methenamine** is a urinary antiseptic for the prophylaxis or suppression of recurrent urinary tract infections. Methenamine is hydrolyzed to formaldehyde and ammonia in acidic urine.

***Combination with sulfonamide is contraindicated.***

### **Photomicrograph showing urine sediment of a patient with sulfonamide crystalluria**

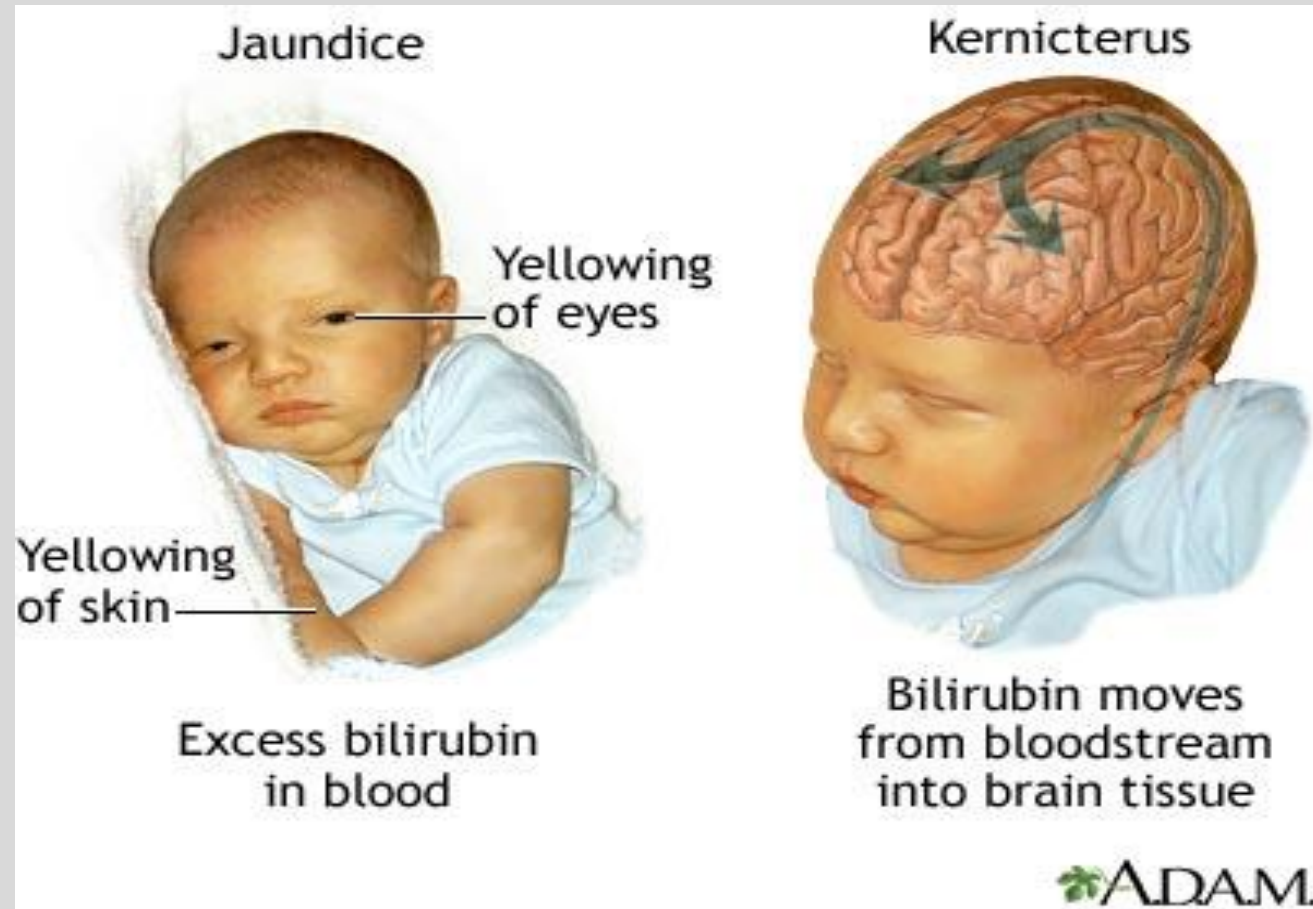


Urine sediment showing sulfonamide crystals with a needle-shaped appearance. Other forms that may be seen include rosettes and a shock of wheat appearance.

*Courtesy of Harvard Medical School.*



Kernicterus can lead to brain damage in infants.



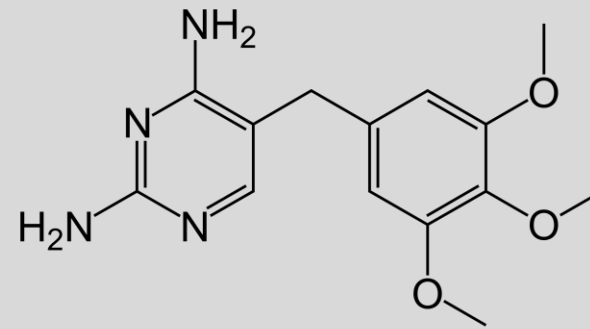
**Sulfonamide therapy is not recommended in children  $\leq 2$  months old.**



<http://pick.foxtaildesign.com/research/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/jaundice/index.html>

# Trimethoprim Pyrimethamine



## Trimethoprim Properties

PK	Oral, well-absorbed; widely distributed in fluids and tissues; some hepatic metabolism; excreted in urine, unchanged drug; $t_{1/2}$ 8-10 h adults w. normal renal fx
MOA	Inhibits bacterial DHFR, which inhibits nucleic acid synthesis and DNA Resistance mechanisms as for the sulfonamides, specifically DHFR with reduced sensitivity
TU	Trimethoprim monotherapy: Treatment of acute, uncomplicated urinary tract infection (UTI) and Prophylaxis of UTI
AEs	Megaloblastic anemia, leukopenia, granulocytopenia (rare) (hematopoietic effects of folate synthesis inhibition) Hyperkalemia
DDIs	Other drugs that may enhance the neutropenic or hyperkalemic effects



Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole is effective in a wide variety of infections – if the pathogens have not developed resistance.

The 2 drugs have a similar half-life. The fixed TMP-SMX combination is in a 1 to 5 ratio that provides peak plasma concentration in the optimal 1:20 ratio

UTIs, Prostatitis	<i>E. Coli, Klebsiella, Proteus</i>	Enterobacterales resistance is common	
Traveler’s diarrhea	Enterotoxigenic <i>E. coli</i>		
Gastroenteritis	Shigella		
Acute otitis media	Susceptible <i>S. pneumoniae, H. influenzae, M. catarrhalis</i>		
Skin infections	Susceptible community-acquired MRSA		
<b>Nocardia (gram-positive)</b>	<b>TMP-SMX is drug of choice</b>		
Listeria	Ampicillin combo if gentamicin cannot be used		
<b>Pneumocystis pneumonia</b>	<b><i>Pneumocystis jirovecii</i> (yeast) TMP-SMX drug of choice</b>		
Some protozoa	<i>Toxoplasma gondii</i> (TMP-SMX or sulfadiazine and pyrimethamine) Malaria (sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine)		

23

## Check your knowledge

1. What is the bacterial enzyme that sulfonamides target?
2. What is the antibacterial spectrum of sulfonamides?
3. What are resistance mechanisms?
4. What organisms are intrinsically resistant to folate synthesis inhibitors?
5. Why are sulfonamides combined with a DHFR inhibitor for treatment of systemic infections?
6. What are the names of the sulfonamide and the DHFR inhibitor in fixed-combination for treatment of bacterial infections?
7. What are the names of the sulfonamides and the DHFR inhibitor used in combination for treatment of certain protozoal infections?
8. TMP-SMX is the drug of choice for which two infections?
9. What is the proposed mechanism of the rashes caused by sulfonamide treatment?
10. What is the reason sulfonamide therapy is not recommended in late pregnancy and infants <2 months old? And the mechanism?
11. What sulfonamides are used topically for burn treatment?
12. What are two adverse effects of mafenide acetate?

## Summary of the Folate Synthesis Inhibitors

- **Sulfonamides** are weak acids structurally similar to PABA. They are competitive inhibitors of dihydropteroate synthase (DHPS). DHPS is a selective drug target because we do not synthesize folic acid but take it in folic acid in our diet.
- **Trimethoprim** is a weak base structurally similar to folic acid that inhibits dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR), blocking the conversion of dihydrofolate to active tetrahydrofolate, the second step in bacterial folate synthesis. Trimethoprim has lower affinity of human DHFR, accounting for its relative selectivity.
- Used alone, sulfonamides and trimethoprim are bacteriostatic. Together, they have synergistic and bactericidal activity and a broader spectrum than either agent alone. Trimethoprim and sulfamethoxazole are formulated in fixed combination for oral and IV administration.
- They have broad spectrums of activity against streptococci, staphylococci, and aerobic gram-negative bacilli. Resistance is widespread and especially common among the Enterobacterales, limiting the use of the folate inhibitors.
- The mechanisms of resistance to sulfonamides are reduced intracellular concentration of drug (decreased permeability or drug efflux), increased PABA production that outcompetes the drug at DHPS, and decreased affinity of DHPS for the drugs.
- A common mechanism of trimethoprim resistance is production of DHFR with decreased affinity for the drug.

- The sulfonamides and trimethoprim are rarely used as single drug therapy.
- Clinical applications for sulfonamides are antibacterial ophthalmic drops, topical burn preparations, ulcerative colitis/rheumatoid arthritis (sulfasalazine), malaria and toxoplasmosis in combination with pyrimethamine.
- Trimethoprim may be used for prophylaxis of urinary tract infection or *Pneumocystis* pneumonia with dapsone.
- Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX) has many therapeutics uses for aerobic gram-positive and gram-negative infection caused by susceptible bacteria.
- Hypersensitivity reactions with skin rash and fever are common with sulfonamides. Serious but rare toxicities include hepatitis, blood dyscrasias, hemolytic anemia in people with G6PD deficiency, crystalluria, and kernicterus in the neonate. Trimethoprim can cause megaloblastic anemia due to its antifolate action.
- Pharmacokinetic features of sulfonamides are modest tissue penetration, hepatic metabolism involving mainly N-acetyltransferase and CYPs, with excretion of active drug and acetylated metabolites in the urine. The drugs tend to precipitate in acidic urine. Patients should be advised to drink lots of water when taking these drugs.
- Pharmacokinetic features of trimethoprim are extensive absorption, minor hepatic metabolism, excretion of unchanged drug in urine, and a half-life similar to that of sulfamethoxazole, 10-12 hours.

## Check your knowledge Answers

1. Sulfonamides bind dihydropteroate synthase and compete with PABA in the first step of bacterial folate synthesis.
2. The sulfonamides and TMP-SMX are active against many susceptible aerobic gram-negative and gram-positive organisms including community-acquired MRSA (caMRSA).
3. Resistance arises by ↓ intracellular accumulation of drug (efflux or decrease permeability), increased PABA production that outcompetes the drug at DHPS), and modified targets (DHPS and DHFR) with low affinity for the drugs.
4. Anaerobes, enterococci, *P. aeruginosa*, spirochetes, *Mycoplasma*, *Mycobacterium* spp are intrinsically resistant. Sulfonamides stimulate growth of *Rickettsia*. There is widespread resistance to common infections that were once susceptible.
5. Sulfonamides are bacteriostatic. Trimethoprim is bacteriostatic. Together they are bactericidal and synergistic. Sulfonamides are combined with pyrimethamine for synergy against certain protozoal infections.

## Check your knowledge Answers

6. Sulfamethoxazole / Trimethoprim
7. Pyrimethamine (DHFR inhibitor) with sulfadoxine for malaria (high-level resistance).  
Pyrimethamine with sulfadiazine for toxoplasmosis.
7. TMP-SMX is the drug of choice for drug of choice for prevention and treatment of *Pneumocystis* pneumonia, which affects AIDS patients, and nocardiosis, a disease affecting the brain, lungs, and skin – most common in people with weakened immune systems.
8. Reduced function of NAT2 and reduced glutathione levels increase concentrations of sulfonamides' toxic reactive metabolites.
9. Kernicterus (encephalopathy) in the newborn by displacement of unconjugated bilirubin by sulfonamide on albumin, increasing free bilirubin which deposits in brain tissue.
10. Silver sulfadiazine and mafenide acetate.
11. Mafenide acetate in large quantities can cause metabolic acidosis by inhibition of carbonic anhydrase and pain on application.



## References

- Access Medicine Goodman & Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics 14e, 2023; Chapter 57: DNA Disrupters: Sulfonamides, Quinolones, and Nitroimidazoles
- Access Medicine Goodman and Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics 14e, 2023; Chap 57: DNA Disrupters: Sulfonamides, Quinolones, and Nitroimidazoles
- Access Medicine Katzung Basic and Clinical Pharmacology 16e, 2022: Chapters 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Fluoroquinolones
- LWW Health Library, Premium Basic Sciences: Lippincott Illustrated Reviews: Biochemistry, 8e, 2022 Chapter 13: Pentose Phosphate Pathway and Nicotinamide Diadenine Dinucleotide Phosphate
- The Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy 52e, 2022
- UpToDate: various topics Literature reviews current through July 2024
- UpToDate Lexidrug

## References

- A PK/PD Approach to Antibiotic Therapy [http://www.rxkinetics.com/antibiotic\\_pk\\_pd.html](http://www.rxkinetics.com/antibiotic_pk_pd.html)
- Access Medicine Goodman and Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics 14e, 2023; Chap 57: DNA Disrupters: Sulfonamides, Quinolones, and Nitroimidazoles
- Access Medicine Katzung Basic & Clinical Pharmacology 15e, 2021: Chapters 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Fluoroquinolones
- Lexicomp, accessed July 2023
- LWW Health Library, Medical Education: Lippincott Illustrated Reviews: Biochemistry, 8e, 2022 Chapter 13: Pentose Phosphate Pathway and Nicotinamide Diadenine Dinucleotide Phosphate
- The Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy 52e, 2022

Lecture Feedback Form:

<https://comresearchdata.nyit.edu/redcap/surveys/?s=HRCY448FWYXREL4R>

## Pharmacology of Antibiotics: Fluoroquinolones

Leslie Goldstein, Pharm.D.  
Associate Professor of Pharmacology  
Department of Clinical Specialties  
Pharmacology Division  
[lgolds01@nyit.edu](mailto:lgolds01@nyit.edu)



# NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

College of Osteopathic  
Medicine

Do.  
Make.  
Heal.  
Innovate.  
Reinvent the Future.

After completing the preparation materials, students should be able to:

1. Identify the fluoroquinolones' (FQs) clinically relevant class and drug-specific pharmacokinetics properties.
2. Differentiate the mechanisms of action, resistance, and cross-resistance for the fluoroquinolones.
3. Give examples of the therapeutic applications of each of the clinically used fluoroquinolones in relation to their specific spectrums of activity.
4. Explain the mechanisms of potential adverse reactions and drug interactions for the fluoroquinolones.
5. Correlate the common and potentially serious adverse effects of the fluoroquinolones class with their cautions and contraindications for use.

## Preparation Materials (links are in the CPG and on the next slide)

### Required

- ScholarRx Bricks | Practice Questions and Clinical Vignettes

### Highly relevant optional materials:

- Dr. Goldstein's Notes Handout | Video lectures | Guided Reading Questions (GRQs)
- Textbook resources with links are listed on the next slide

### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- *Use the learning resources that work best for you.*
- *You do not need to study all of them.*
- *Work through the GUIDED READING QUESTIONS with pen/pencil and paper.*  
*Try answering them in your OWN WORDS first without looking at the readings, and then again after reviewing.*
- *Practice questions (not graded) to help you think through the question and apply the principles*

### ScholarRx:

Name of Discipline/ Organ System: General Microbiology > Antimicrobial Agents > Antibacterial Drugs

Title of Brick: Fluoroquinolones

Link(s): [https://usmle-rx.scholarrx.com/rx-bricks/brick/CP\\_MIC0016](https://usmle-rx.scholarrx.com/rx-bricks/brick/CP_MIC0016)

Access Medicine Katzung's Basic & Clinical Pharmacology, 16e, 2024; 46: Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3382&sectionid=281754915>

Access Medicine Katzung's Pharmacology Examination & Board Review, 14e, 2024; Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3461&sectionid=285598294>

LWW Health Library Premium Basic Sciences: Lippincott's Illustrated Reviews: Pharmacology, 8e, 2023; Chapter 31: Quinolones, Folic Acid Antagonists, and Urinary Tract Antiseptics > section on Quinolones

<https://premiumbasicsciences.lwwhealthlibrary.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?sectionid=253328879&bookid=3222>

Any current microbiology textbook



### ScholarRx:

Name of Discipline/ Organ System: General Microbiology > Antimicrobial Agents > Antibacterial Drugs

Title of Brick: Fluoroquinolones

Link(s): <https://exchange.scholarrx.com/brick/fluoroquinolones>

Access Medicine Katzung's Basic & Clinical Pharmacology, 16e, 2024; 46: Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3382&sectionid=281754915>

Access Medicine Katzung's Pharmacology Examination & Board Review, 14e, 2024; Chapter 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Quinolones > Quinolones

<https://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?bookid=3461&sectionid=285598294>

LWW Health Library Premium Basic Sciences: Lippincott's Illustrated Reviews: Pharmacology, 8e, 2023; Chapter 31: Quinolones, Folic Acid Antagonists, and Urinary Tract Antiseptics > section on Quinolones

<https://premiumbasicsciences.lwwhealthlibrary.com.nyit.idm.oclc.org/content.aspx?sectionid=253328879&bookid=3222>

Any current microbiology textbook

## Fluoroquinolones Key Points

- Fluoroquinolones (FQs) are broad-spectrum antibiotics highly effective in the management of many different bacterial infections caused by aerobic gram-negative and gram-positive infections.
- FQs interfere with DNA synthesis by forming a FQ-enzyme-DNA ternary complex, which inhibits the actions of DNA gyrase (primary target in gram negative bacteria) and topoisomerase IV (especially in gram positive bacteria).
- DNA gyrase: The FQ-topoisomerase-DNA complex interrupts the replication fork, prevents re-ligation of the DNA, and promotes breakage of double-stranded DNA, leading to cell death.
- Topoisomerase IV: The FQ-topo-DNA complex interferes with separation of the replicated chromosomal DNA (decatenation) during cell division.
- FQs are bactericidal.
- Resistance to FQs may arise during therapy by chromosomal mutations in genes 1) encoding DNA gyrase or topoisomerase IV, 2) mutations leading to increased expression of efflux pumps, or 3) under-expression of porins. Plasmid transfer of genes encoding topo protection protein (Qnr) or acetyltransferase that modifies the FQ structure and inactivates the drug lead to low-level resistance.
- FQ resistance is common and widespread.

## Fluoroquinolones Key Points

- FQs class pharmacokinetic properties: oral and parenteral administration, large volumes of distribution, low to moderate plasma protein binding, minor hepatic metabolism, high bioavailability, mainly renal excretion, drug-specific half-lives.
- Parameters associated with efficacy (PK-PD profile): concentration-dependent effects and  $AUC_{24}/MIC$  ratio with organism-specific post-antibiotic effect.  $C_{max}/MIC$  and  $AUC_{24}/MIC$  goals are listed in the drug monographs.
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea are common side effects. FQs are associated with higher rates of *C. difficile* infection compared to other antibiotics.
- A range of serious adverse effects are reported with FQ use. Included are tendon rupture, peripheral neuropathy, exacerbation of myasthenia gravis (muscle weakness), QT interval prolongation, aortic aneurysm/dissection, dysglycemia (hypo-/hyperglycemia), and phototoxicity. Older patients are at increased risk of adverse effects.
- The FDA has issued several US Boxed Warnings and recommended against the use of FQs for uncomplicated infections. Expert recommendation is to weigh benefits vs risks before prescribing FQs.
- Drug interactions: Oral absorption is reduced by the presence of di- and trivalent cations. Ciprofloxacin inhibits CYP1A2 and increases blood levels of theophylline. Glucocorticoids increase the risk of tendon rupture. Avoid administration with other drugs that cause QT interval prolongation.

# Fluoroquinolones

Inhibit bacterial DNA gyrase and topoisomerase IV

FQs available in the U.S.  
for systemic use:

Older FQ

\*Ciprofloxacin

Respiratory FQs

\*Levofloxacin

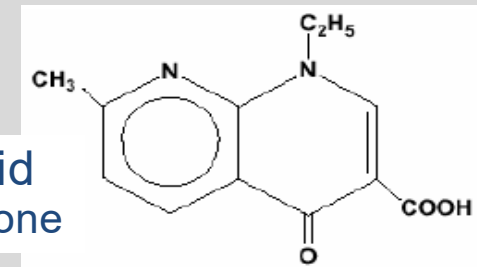
\*Moxifloxacin

\*Delafloxacin

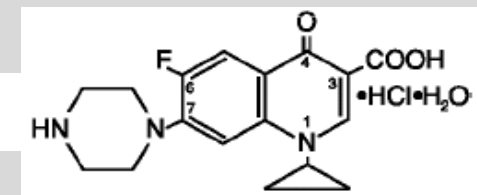
Ofloxacin

Respiratory FQ: Activity against *S. pneumoniae*

Nalidixic acid  
the first quinolone



Ciprofloxacin



## FQ Pharmacokinetics Properties

### Class properties

- Oral / IV, rapid complete absorption from GI tract | Absorption impaired by **di- and trivalent cations**
- Moderate plasma protein binding | Widely distributed with high concentrations in tissues
  - CSF, respiratory, abdominal, uterine, prostate, kidney, urine, stool
  - macrophages, neutrophils
- Renal excretion of unchanged drug | adjust dose interval and/or dose in renal impairment

### Clinically relevant drug-specific PK properties

Ciprofloxacin	Levofloxacin	Moxifloxacin	Delafloxacin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hepatic metabolism</li> <li>• CYP1A2, 3A4 <b>inhibitor</b></li> <li>• urine: 30-70%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• minimal metabolism</li> <li>• urine: 87%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hepatic metabolism</li> <li>• glucuronide and sulfate conjugation</li> <li>• urine: 20%</li> <li>• feces: 25%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high protein binding</li> <li>• glucuronide conjugation</li> <li>• urine: 50% (oral)</li> <li>• feces 48% (oral)</li> </ul>

Percentages (%) = excretion of unchanged drug

Ofloxacin's PK profile and activity are very similar to levofloxacin's.

## What is the meaning of clinical relevant pharmacokinetics?

A treatment is clinically relevant if it provides a positive benefit in how the patient feels, functions, and/or survives – the perception of benefit by the patient – and outweighs potential harm = optimization of therapy.

Knowing the pharmacokinetic properties enables prescribing the right drug for the individual patient at the right dose by the right route of administration and the right duration for optimal efficacy (benefit to the patient) and minimal harm.

### ADME:

- correct route of administration for desired effect and patient adherence to therapy,
- distribution to site of action in therapeutic concentration (correct dose) but not excessive concentration, which would increase the risk of adverse effects
- hepatic function → drug metabolizing capacity
- potential for metabolism/transport drug interactions
- function of drug eliminating organs (renal and hepatic function)

**Application of knowledge can give the prescriber the ability to anticipate and mitigate potential PK-related adverse effects and drug interactions.**



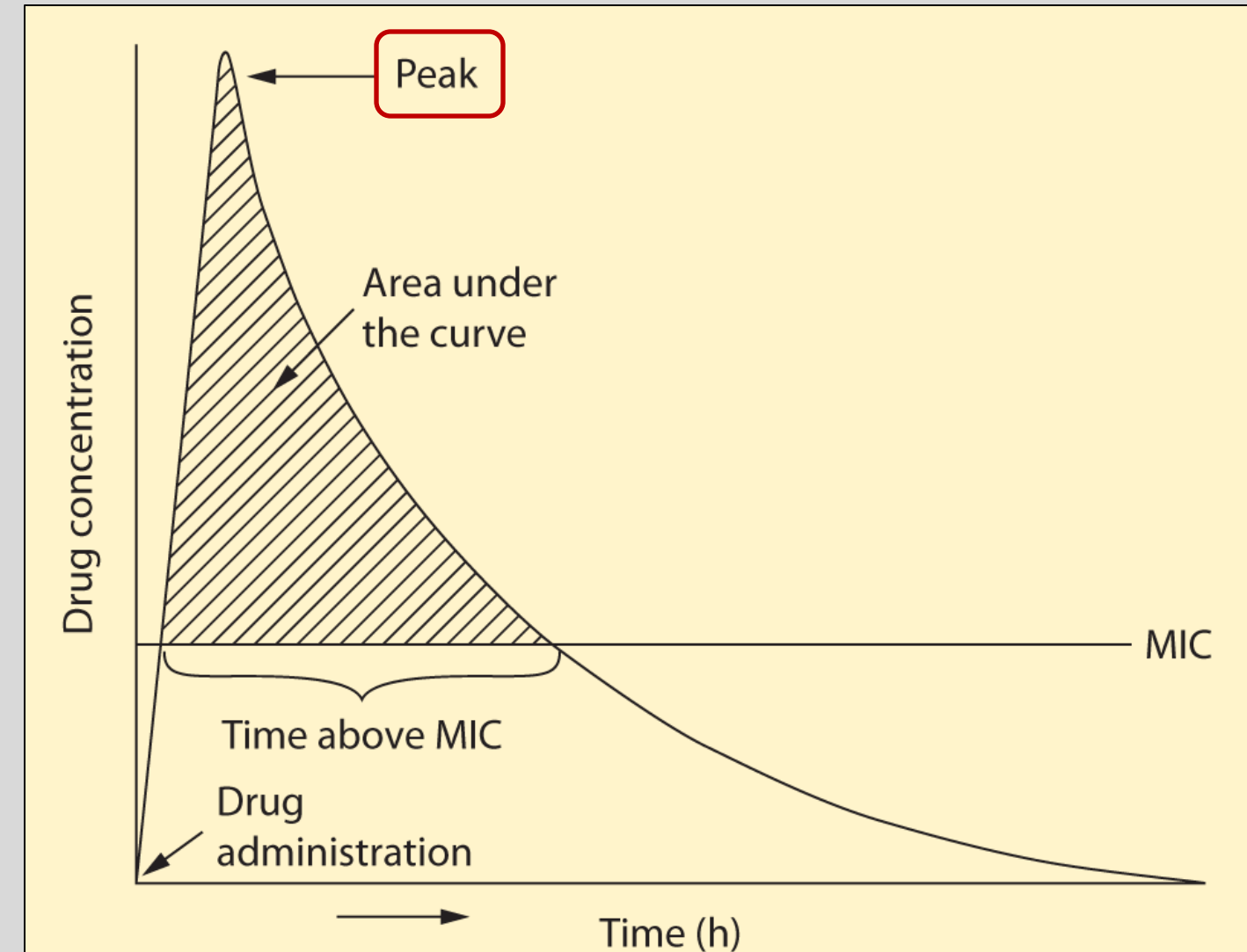
## Fluoroquinolones PK-PD Profile

- **C<sub>max</sub>/MIC:** concentration-dependent bacterial killing (in vitro)
  - the greater the concentration, the greater the rate and extent of bacterial killing –
- **Post-antibiotic effect:** moderate persistent bacterial suppression
- **24h-AUC/MIC Ratio:** Efficacy correlates with total amount of drug (at steady state)

The ideal dosing regimen maximizes the total amount of drug administered over a 24-hour period.

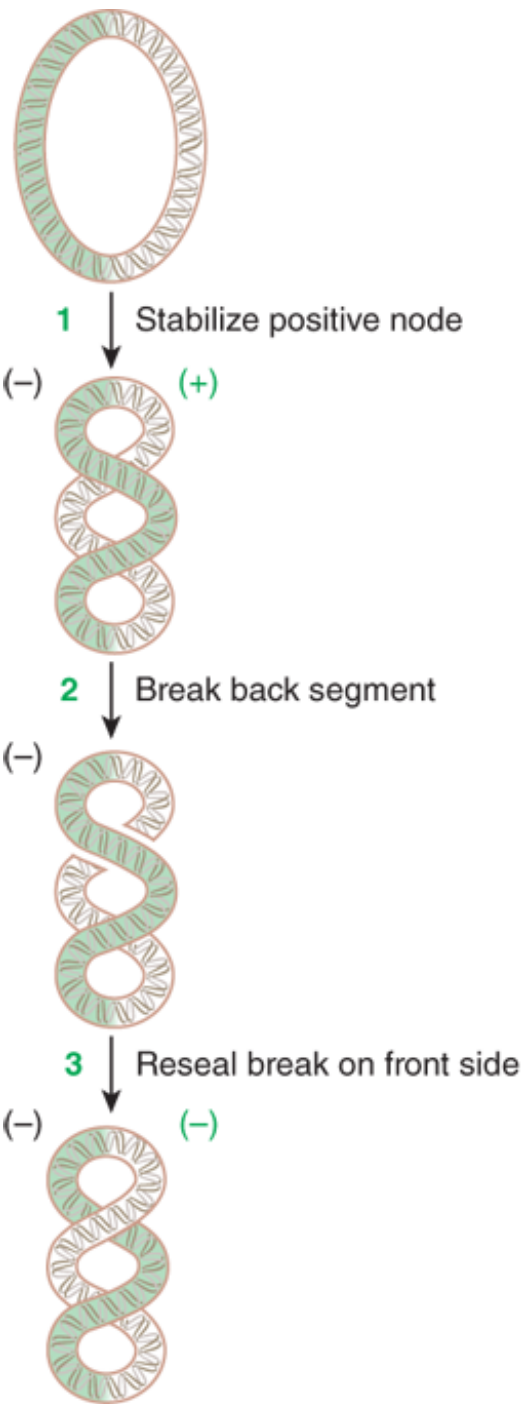
Organism-dependent values predictive of clinical success are available in the literature.

- **Killing effect: Bactericidal**



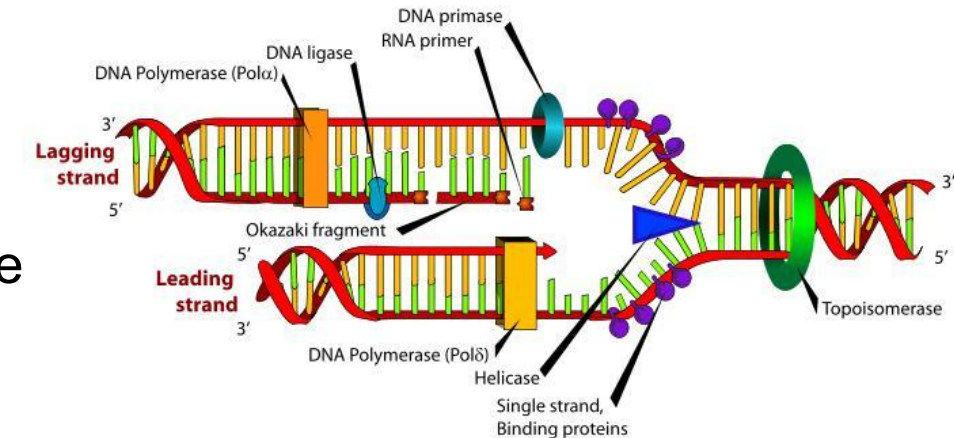
Source: Frederick S. Southwick: *Infectious Diseases: A Clinical Short Course*, 4e  
Copyright © McGraw-Hill Education. All Rights Reserved.





Model of the formation of negative DNA supercoils by DNA gyrase.

- (1) DNA gyrase binds to two segments of DNA, creating a node of positive (+) superhelix.
- (2) The enzyme then introduces a double-strand break in the DNA and passes the front segment through the break.
- (3) The break is then resealed, relaxing the torsional strain due to overwinding in front of the replication fork and transcription complexes, creating a negative (−) supercoil.



<https://step1.medbullets.com/biochemistry/102011/dna-replication>

Quinolones bind topoisomerase and form a **FQ-topo-DNA ternary complex**.

**DNA gyrase inhibition** by quinolones stalls the replication fork and prevents re-ligation of the DNA and relaxation of the positive supercoils.

Complexes containing broken DNA cannot be resealed → double-strand breaks in DNA are generated → cell death.

**Topoisomerase IV** inhibition blocks separation (decatenation) of replicated chromosomal DNA into the respective daughter cells during cell division.

- The different affinities for the bacterial topoisomerases may explain the differences in the different fluoroquinolones' spectrums of action.

Source: Laurence L. Brunton, Björn C. Knollman  
*Goodman & Gilman's: The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics, 14e*.  
 Copyright © McGraw Hill. All rights reserved.

## Resistance to fluoroquinolones is common and rates are growing.

### Chromosomally-mediated mechanisms

The main mechanisms are target modification and reduced permeability to the drug.

- **Target modification:** One or more point mutations in chromosomal genes encoding the binding region of DNA gyrase and topoisomerase IV
- **Reduced accumulation of drug:**
  - Active transport (efflux) of the drug out of the bacteria or
  - changes in porin structures

### Plasmid-mediated mechanisms

These confer low-level resistance, unless they accumulate or occur with chromosomal resistance mutations.

- **Topo protection:** Topoisomerase binding site protection proteins (Qnr proteins)
- **Drug modification:** Acetylation by acetyltransferase that inactivates the drug

Low-level resistance unless mutations accumulate or combined with chromosomal resistance mechanisms.

➤ **Resistance can emerge during therapy**, especially among: *E. coli* and other enteric bacteria, *Pseudomonas*, *N. gonorrhoeae*, and staphylococci  
Cross-resistance: High-level resistance to one FQ confers resistance to the others.  
(Delafloxacin appears to retain activity.)

As a class, FQs are highly active with a broad spectrum of activity.

Different affinities for the topoisomerases may explain the differences the FQs' spectrums of action.

Activity of FQs if the microbe is susceptible (not resistant to FQ)				
Bacteria	Cipro	Levo	Moxi	Dela
Enterobacterales	✓	✓	✓	✓ less but adequate
<i>P. aeruginosa</i>	✓	✓		✓
Respiratory pathogens				
<i>S. pneumoniae</i>		✓	✓	✓
<i>H. influenzae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>M. catarrhalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>M. pneumoniae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Chlamydia</i> spp		✓	✓	✓
<i>Legionella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>N. meningitidis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other streptococci	Variable activity. Beta-lactams preferred.			✓
MSSA		✓	✓	✓
MRSA				✓
<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i>		✓	✓ preferred FQ	?
Anaerobes (not <i>Bacteroides</i> )			✓	

Empiric Therapy (not a complete list)				
Disease	Cipro <sup>1</sup>	Levo	Moxi	Dela
Upper respiratory infections		✓	✓	
Pneumonia (CAP/HAP/VAP) <sup>2</sup>	combination for <i>Pseudomonas</i>	✓	✓ and anaerobic	✓ CAP
Meningitis, community-acquired		✓severe PCN allergy	✓ severe PCN allergy	
Skin / Skin structure		✓	✓	✓including MRSA
Osteomyelitis ( <i>S. aureus</i> )		✓		
Intra-abdominal	✓	✓		
Gastroenteritis	✓	✓	✓	
Prostatitis, acute or chronic	✓	✓	✓	
Urinary tract infection	✓	✓		
Gonorrhea				
Chlamydia infection		✓		
Tuberculosis, MDR		✓	✓	
<i>Pseudomonas</i> infections	✓	✓		

<sup>1</sup>Ciprofloxacin is mainly for gram-negative infections including *Pseudomonas*.

<sup>2</sup>CAP: community-acquired pneumonia; HAP: hospital-acquired pneumonia; VAP: ventilator-associated pneumonia

➤ **FQs are not first-line choices for uncomplicated infections due to potential toxicities.** 15

## Adverse Effects of Fluoroquinolones

Fluoroquinolones are associated with ***potentially permanent and disabling adverse effects*** of the tendons, muscles, joints, nerves, and CNS that may occur together in the same patient and may occur soon after initiation of therapy.

➤ Consider patients' risk factors and weigh benefit vs risk when considering FQ therapy.

### US Boxed Warnings

- CNS:

Seizures (rare), ↑intracranial pressure, headache, dizziness, insomnia, nightmares, depression, psychosis

- Peripheral neuropathy  
(can be irreversible)
- Tendon rupture
- Myasthenia gravis exacerbation

### Additional potential AEs

- Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea
- QT interval prolongation
- Glucose dysregulation (serious hypoglycemia/hyperglycemia in diabetic patients)
- Aneurysm / aortic dissection
- *C. difficile* or *Candida* infection
- Phototoxicity
- Hypersensitivity reactions

## Special Populations

### Pregnancy

- FQs Cross the placenta and can be found in cord blood
- No specific teratogenic effect or increased pregnancy risk has been identified.
- May be used in the treatment of multidrug resistant tuberculosis, inhalational anthrax, and plague (*Yersinia pestis*) during pregnancy.

**Older patients:** Adverse effects may be increased in the elderly.

### Pediatrics

- Dosing recommendations are available for infants  $\geq 6$  months old and children
- FQs are not first-line agents in pediatric patients. A FQ may be considered after assessment of risks and benefits and no safe alternatives are available.
- Arthralgias and joint pain during therapy are more common among children receiving FQs relative to comparators, studies have not noted long-term joint abnormalities or growth inhibition among children exposed to FQs.



# FQ Drug Interactions

## Ciprofloxacin:

CYP1A2, 3A4 inhibitor, OAT substrate

### Classic example of ciprofloxacin DDI:

- Theophylline is a substrate of CYP1A2 and inhibited by ciprofloxacin.
- Theophylline has the potential to cause seizures at higher concentrations.
- Theophylline as a narrow therapeutic window.

Ciprofloxacin + Theophylline



Increased theophylline levels



Increased seizure risk

- Ciprofloxacin may increase levels of CYP3A4 substrates and OAT substrates

## All FQs:

### • QTc prolongation: Examples

- antiarrhythmics
- macrolides
- azole antifungals
- antipsychotics
- tricyclic, SSRI antidepressants
- many more

### • Glucocorticoids:

- Concomitant use may → ↑risk of **tendon rupture**

- **Antacids and other divalent cations** → ↓FQ absorption

## Check your knowledge:

1. How is gaining knowledge about class and drug-specific PK properties relevant to optimizing drug therapy for the individual patient?
2. What parameters are associated with clinical efficacy (and provide dosing guidance)?
3. What are the bacterial targets of the FQs?
4. What are the chromosomal and plasmid-mediated resistance mechanisms?
5. Which mechanisms confer low-level resistance ?
6. What risks must be weighed against the benefit when considering therapy with a FQ?

## Summary of Fluoroquinolone Antibiotics

**PK:** Good oral bioavailability (antacids containing multivalent cations may interfere with absorption); penetrate most body tissues. High concentrations in urine (except moxifloxacin – hepatic and biliary elimination)

**Efficacy is associated with:** 24h AUC/MIC and C<sub>max</sub>/MIC; post-antibiotic effects

**Action:** Inhibit bacterial DNA gyrase and topoisomerase IV → DNA strand breaks / cell death; inhibition of topo IV prevents separation of daughter cells (decatenation)

**Antibacterial effect:** Bactericidal

**Chromosomally-mediated resistance:**

Spontaneous point mutations in the genes encoding the topoisomerases

Reduced intracellular accumulation of the drug (efflux or decreased influx through porins)

**Plasmid-mediated resistance** → low-level resistance:

Qnr protein protects topoisomerase binding site

FQ-modifying enzymes

*Resistance can develop during therapy.*

---

**Ciprofloxacin:**

Active against gram-negative aerobic bacteria including *P. aeruginosa*

Moderate activity against gram-positive organisms

---

**Levofloxacin:** Respiratory FQ

Enhanced gram-positive activity, including *S. pneumoniae* and other respiratory pathogens

Aerobic gram-negative bacteria, including *Pseudomonas*

Many therapeutic uses

---

**Moxifloxacin:** Respiratory FQ

Improved gram-positive activity and reduced activity against gram-negative bacteria.

The only FQ with anaerobic activity: anaerobic lung infections, ie abscess, aspiration pneumonia.

---

**Delafloxacin:** Respiratory FQ

Aerobic gram-negative bacteria, including *P. aeruginosa*; Improved gram-positive activity, including MRSA

For treatment of acute bacterial skin and skin structure infections in adults caused by aerobic gram-positive, including MRSA, and community acquired pneumonia

---

**Toxicities:** FDA safety alerts:

CNS effects, peripheral neuropathy, tendinitis/tendon rupture, worsening of myasthenia gravis muscle weakness, QTc interval prolongation, hypersensitivity reactions.

---

**Pregnancy:** MDR tuberculosis, inhalation anthrax and serious infection if benefit outweighs risk

---

**Pediatrics:** Infants  $\geq 6$  months old and children if benefit outweighs risk

---

**Older patient:** Adverse effects may be increased in the elderly.

---

**Drug interactions:**

Ciprofloxacin: CYP1A2 (theophylline toxicity risk), 3A4- and OAT-mediated

All FQs: drugs prolong QTc interval; glucocorticoids (tendon rupture); di-, trivalent cations reduce absorption (separate by 2 hours)



## Check your knowledge:

1. How is gaining knowledge about class and drug-specific PK properties relevant to optimizing drug therapy for the individual patient?
2. What parameters are associated with clinical efficacy (and provide dosing guidance)?
3. What are the bacterial targets of the FQs?
4. What are the chromosomal and plasmid-mediated resistance mechanisms?
5. Which mechanisms confer low-level resistance ?
6. What risks must be weighed against the benefit when considering therapy with a FQ?

### 1. **Right drug | Right patient | Right dose | Right route | Right time**

The ability to **anticipate and mitigate** potential PK-related adverse effects and drug interactions.

2. Concentration-dependent C<sub>max</sub>/MIC; AUC<sub>24</sub>/MIC; post-antibiotic effect
3. DNA gyrase (main target in gram-negatives); topo IV (main target in gram-positives)
4. Chromosomal mutations in genes of FQ binding regions, efflux pumps, porins. Plasmid transfer of genes for topo protection protein (Qnr) and drug inactivation by acetylation.
5. Plasmid transfer of genes for topo protection protein (Qnr) and drug inactivation by acetylation confer low-level resistance, unless they accumulate or are coupled with chromosomal resistance mutations.
6. Significant toxicities, including peripheral neuropathy, tendon rupture, QT prolongation, and CNS effects. Patient factors at increased risk of experiencing adverse effects: older patients, pediatric patients, pregnant patients, myasthenia gravis patients, diabetic patients.

## References

- Access Medicine Goodman & Gilman's The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics 14e, 2023; Chapter 57: DNA Disrupters: Sulfonamides, Quinolones, and Nitroimidazoles
- Access Medicine Katzung's Basic and Clinical Pharmacology 16e, 2024: Chapters 46: Sulfonamides, Trimethoprim, & Fluoroquinolones
- FDA July 26, 2016 FDA Drug Safety Communication: FDA advises restricting fluoroquinolone antibiotic use for certain uncomplicated infections; warns about disabling side effects that can occur together.  
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm500143.htm>
- FDA July 10, 2018 FDA updates warnings for fluoroquinolone antibiotics on risks of mental health and low blood sugar adverse reactions. <https://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm612995.htm>
- Onufrak NJ, Forrest A, Gonzalez D. Pharmacokinetic and Pharmacodynamic Principles of Anti-infective Dosing. Clin Ther. 2016 Sep;38(9):1930-47. doi: 10.1016/j.clinthera.2016.06.015. Epub 2016 Jul 20. PMID: 27449411; PMCID: PMC5039113.
- Lexidrugs monographs, Aug 2024
- The Sanford Guide to Antimicrobial Therapy 52e, 2022
- UpToDate various topics; literature reviews current through July 2024

Lecture Feedback Form:

<https://comresearchdata.nyit.edu/redcap/surveys/?s=HRCY448FWYXREL4R>