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Title	Calculating the half-life of medications
Type	Article
URL	https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/51842/
DOI	10.12968/jprp.2024.6.6.238
Date	2024
Citation	Davies, Janice Anne (2024) Calculating the half-life of medications. Journal of Prescribing Practice, 6 (6). p. 238. ISSN 2631-8385
Creators	Davies, Janice Anne

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. 10.12968/jprp.2024.6.6.238

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Calculating the half-life of medications

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Half-life is the time taken for the concentration of drug in the plasma to fall by half. It is important for prescribers to have knowledge of the concept of half-life, in order to understand the relationship between impaired elimination of drugs from the body and the risk of toxicity. If metabolism or excretion are impaired, the half-life of drugs will be prolonged, necessitating either a dose reduction or prolongation of the dose interval. Practise calculating the reduction in plasma concentration for the following drugs.

Table 1. Reduction in plasma concentration					
Drug	Plasma concentration (mg/L)	Plasma concentration after ONE half-life (mg/L)	Plasma concentration after TWO half-lives (mg/L)		
Digoxin	2.0				
Theophylline	20				
Lithium	1.2				
Salicylate	300				
Flecainide	0.8				

Table 1. Reduction in plasma concentration					
Drug	Plasma concentration (mg/L)	Plasma concentration after ONE half-life (mg/L)	Plasma concentration after TWO half-lives (mg/L)		
Digoxin	2.0	1.0	0.5		
Theophylline	20	10	5		
Lithium	1.2	0.6	0.3		
Salicylate	300	150	75		
Flecainide	0.8	0.4	0.2		