

Proper Antibiotic Use

Getting your family immunized is an important way to prevent getting sick, but if a sickness does arise it's important to know how to use antibiotics properly. antibiotics are powerful drugs used to treat illnesses, but they do not cure everything, and unnecessary use of antibiotics can be harmful.

Viruses vs. Bacteria

There are two main types of germs that cause most infections. These are viruses and bacteria.

Viruses cause:

- All colds and flu
- Most coughs
- Most sore throats

Bacteria cause:

- Most ear infections
- Some sinus infections
- Strep throat
- Urinary tract infections



Antibiotics cannot kill viruses. Antibiotics do kill specific bacteria.

Each time you take an antibiotic, bacteria are killed. Sometimes bacteria may be resistant or become resistant. These resistant bacteria do not respond to the antibiotics and continue to cause infection.

Each time you take an antibiotic unnecessarily or improperly, you increase your chance of developing drug-resistant bacteria. This is why it is really important to take antibiotics only when necessary. It is due to these resistant bacteria that some diseases become nearly impossible to treat.



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What do you need to know about antibiotics?

Remember that antibiotics don't work against cold and flu, and that unnecessary antibiotics can be harmful. Talk to your health care provider about antibiotics and find out about the differences between viruses and bacteria and when antibiotics shouldn't be used.

If you do get an antibiotic, be sure to take it exactly as prescribed. If you stop your antibiotic early, the bacteria that have not yet been killed can restart an infection.

Antibiotic resistance is particularly dangerous for children, but it can occur in adults as well.

How safe are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are generally safe and should always be taken as prescribed by your doctor; however, antibiotics may alter the effectiveness of other medications and cause side effects or allergic reactions.

Antibiotics can kill most of the bacteria in your body that are sensitive to them, including good bacteria. By destroying the bacterial balance, it may cause stomach upsets, diarrhea, vaginal infections, or other problems.

If you take antibiotics unnecessarily you may contribute to the development of antibiotic resistance. If you become sick and your bacteria are resistant to your prescribed antibiotic, your illness lasts longer and you may have to make return office and pharmacy visits to find the right drug to kill the germ. Also, while the resistant bacteria are still alive, you act as a carrier of these germs, and you could pass them to friends or family members.

What should women know before taking antibiotics?

Antibiotics often lead to a vaginal yeast infection. Because antibiotics kill the bacteria in the vagina, yeast cells no longer have competition for food and grow rapidly. Yeast cells begin attacking tissues in the vagina, usually causing one or all of the following symptoms: itching, burning, pain during sex and vaginal discharge. If you think you have a yeast infection, consult a physician.

Antibiotics may reduce the potency of birth control.

As with other medications, some antibiotics may be transmitted to a fetus, and some may cause harm.

Sources: The Centers for Disease Control & The Alliance for the Prudent use of Antibiotics