

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Stay Healthy—Taking Your Antibiotic the Right Way

You can also spread bacteria to your friends, family, and people at work. It's important that you wash your hands.

Your doctor may decide you need to take a drug called an antibiotic (AN-tee-BY-ot-ik). You have probably heard of penicillin. This is one kind of antibiotic. Antibiotics have the power to cure many dangerous infections (in-FEK-shuns).

Your doctor will give you an antibiotic if you have an infection caused by germs called bacteria (bak-TEER-ee-uh). Strep throat and sinus infections are often caused by bacteria.

Your doctor will **not** give you an antibiotic if you are sick because of a virus. A virus is a germ that causes colds and the flu. Antibiotics don't cure viruses.¹

It is important to take your antibiotic the right way²:

- Follow the advice of your doctor
- Do not skip any doses
- Do not share it with others
- Finish all of it even if you start feeling well
- Do not keep it for later

Why is it important to take antibiotics the right way?

Some people take antibiotics the wrong way. They skip doses and they don't finish the whole bottle. Taking only some of the antibiotic treats only some of the bacteria. Then some of the bacteria can change so that it cannot be killed by the antibiotic. These bacteria are called "resistant" (ree-ZIS-tunt) bacteria.¹

Resistant bacteria are harder to kill.¹ This is a very serious problem. Antibiotics may not help people who get sick from these bacteria.¹

Harmful antibiotic resistance

Antibiotic resistance can harm you when you are sick and the antibiotic doesn't make you better. You may stay sick longer.³ Your doctor may have to find another drug to kill the bacteria. You might even have to go to the hospital.³ The worst case may be that there is no medicine to kill the bacteria.



Stay Healthy—Taking Your Antibiotic the Right Way

Sometimes antibiotics aren't the best choice. Tell your doctor about⁴:

- Allergies you have
- Bad reactions to other drugs you have had
- Other health problems
- Any chance that you are pregnant
- Any special diet you might be on
- All medicines you take

How do antibiotics become resistant?

Many people use antibiotics the wrong way. When they are used the wrong way or when a person taking antibiotics doesn't get better, it may mean some of the bacteria are left. These can change into "resistant" bacteria. These resistant bacteria are not killed by the antibiotics because⁵:

- They make a substance that breaks down the antibiotic
- They change their outer shell so antibiotics can't get in
- They make pumps that push the antibiotic out
- They change so that antibiotics can't find points of attack

How can I do my part to fight antibiotic resistance?

- Do not ask or expect your doctor to prescribe antibiotics for cold or flu
- If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic²:
 - Do not skip any doses
 - Do not share it with others
 - Finish all of it even if you start feeling well
 - Do not keep it for later
- For every day hand washing in your home, you do not need to use special "antibacterial" hand soaps. These can kill "good" bacteria along with bad. They can play a role in antibiotic resistance. Proper hand washing with soap that isn't "antibacterial" removes 99.9% of bacteria.⁶

References

1. CDC. "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work." [http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/campaign_materials/Black-White/Brochure-General\(BW\).pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/campaign_materials/Black-White/Brochure-General(BW).pdf)
2. CDC. "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work." Prescription Adherence Tool. http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/campaign_materials/Black-White/Prescription_Adherence_Tool-bw.pdf
3. APUA. When & How to Take Antibiotics. <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Patients/How2Take.html>
4. APUA. When & How to Take Antibiotics. <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Patients/How2Take.html>
5. "Bacteria Battle Back: Addressing Antibiotic Resistance." <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Educ/CME/BBB.pdf>
6. APUA. Antibacterial Agents. <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Patients/antibact/antibact.html>

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