

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Let's Talk About Antibiotics

If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, take all the medicine. If you take only part of it, you treat only part of the infection. This can cause resistant bacteria to form.¹

Antibiotic Q & A

Q: What is an antibiotic?

A: An antibiotic (AN-tee-BY-ot-ik) is a medicine or drug that kills a germ called bacteria (bak-TEER-ee-uh).

Q: When I have a cold or the flu, will an antibiotic make me better?

A: No. The cold, the flu, and many coughs are caused by another kind of germ called a virus. Antibiotics cannot cure a virus.¹

Q: How will I know if I'm sick from a bacteria or a virus?

A: Your doctor or nurse will know. Talk to your doctor or nurse. Follow the advice they give. Your doctor may be able to do tests to figure out the cause of your illness, especially if you have a sore throat.

Q: What is the difference between a bacteria and a virus?

A: They can both cause infections (in-FEK-shuns). Strep throat, some pneumonia, and sinus infections are caused by bacteria. Colds, the flu, and many coughs are caused by viruses.¹

Q: If mucus from my nose changes from clear to yellow to green, do I need an antibiotic?

A: No. This does not mean you have a sinus infection and need an antibiotic. If you have a cold caused by a virus, it is normal for the mucus to get thick and change color.¹ Talk with your doctor about a change in mucus color, especially in a child.

Q: If I have a fever does it mean I have an infection?

A: Anytime you have a fever it is not normal. Talk to your doctor if you have a fever.

Q: If I have a sore throat, should I take an antibiotic?

A: Most sore throats are caused by a virus. Some sore throats are caused by bacteria. Your doctor can do a test to see if your sore throat is bacterial.

Q: When will my doctor prescribe an antibiotic for me?

A: Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections. Your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic for you if you have strep throat, a sinus infection, or some other bacterial infection.



Let's Talk About Antibiotics

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

If it turns out that you have a bacterial infection, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. It is important to take the medicine the way your doctor or nurse tells you. Talk to the pharmacist when you pick up your drug if you have questions. Here is how to take an antibiotic the right way²:

- Do not skip any doses
- Do not share the medicine with others
- Finish the medicine even if you start feeling well
- Do not keep the medicine for later

Over the years, people have taken antibiotics the wrong way. They have also taken antibiotics for the wrong reasons (to treat viruses). This has caused "antibiotic resistance." This means infections get stronger and harder to treat.¹ These infections may no longer be curable by antibiotics.¹ The reason this happens is that some bacteria change, making them able to fight off antibiotics.³

These changed bacteria are harder to kill. Antibiotics may not help people who get sick from these bacteria. Those people might have to go to the hospital to get well.

References

1. CDC. Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work. "Cold or Flu. Antibiotics Don't Work For You" http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/campaign_materials.htm#1
2. CDC. Get Smart "Prescription Adherence Tool." http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/campaign_materials/Black-White/Prescription_Adherence_Tool-bw.pdf
3. CDC. Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work. <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/antibiotic-resistance.htm>
4. APUA. When & How to Take Antibiotics. <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Patients/How2Take.html>