



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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Antibiotics

What are Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are prescription medications that work ONLY on infections caused by bacteria. They work by either killing the bacteria or inhibiting their growth. Antibiotics DO NOT work on infections caused by viruses (such as a cold or flu). Some antibiotics work specifically on certain bacteria, while others work on a variety of organisms.

What is resistance?

Resistance occurs when bacteria genetically change so that the antibiotic no longer helps to kill or slow down the bacteria. Many things contribute to the development of antibacterial resistance including the following:

- inappropriate use of antibiotics for non-bacterial infections,
- not completing prescriptions
- sharing antibiotics with others
- using broad spectrum antibiotics when a more specific drug can be used.

Why should I be worried about resistance?

When bacteria become resistant, it makes it more difficult to treat the illness it is causing. If widespread resistance occurs, many people will become ill and possibly die with simple infections that used to be cured by an antibiotic, but are now resistant to that treatment.

How can I help avoid widespread resistance?

- Only take antibiotics when prescribed by your healthcare provider for infections known to be caused by bacteria.
- Don't insist on antibiotic treatment for illnesses that are not caused by bacteria.
- Take the full course of medicine prescribed, even if you feel better before you finish all of the medicine.

- Never save some of the medicine for the next time you are sick.
- Do not share your antibiotics with someone else, and don't use someone else's medication

How do I know if my infection is bacterial or viral?

There are no particular symptoms that clearly differentiate between a viral and bacterial infection. For example, you may have heard that yellow/green nasal discharge or phlegm or congestion lasting for several days indicates a bacterial infection requiring an antibiotic. In reality, these symptoms may be present with either viral or bacterial infections. It is important to have your healthcare provider assess your particular illness and symptoms to determine if the cause is more likely to be a virus or bacteria. Laboratory tests and cultures may also help to determine the difference. Your healthcare provider will also know the most common organisms that cause particular infections and this knowledge will aid in their treatment decision.

How should I take my antibiotics?

- Always follow the directions on the bottle. Some need to be taken with water, some need to be taken with food, some on an empty stomach. Do not take with fruit juice or milk.
- Always be sure to tell your healthcare provider if you have ever had an allergy to an antibiotic
- Ask your provider what side effects are expected
- Some antibiotics may interfere with birth control pills. Be sure to ask your health care provider.
- *Always complete the full course of antibiotics prescribed-even if you feel better before they are completed.*

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Why is it so important to finish the whole bottle of antibiotics?

If you don't finish the whole bottle of medication, you may leave some of the strongest bacteria behind to reproduce in your body. This can cause the infection and illness to reoccur, possibly in a different form, requiring a stronger medication.

Why is it bad to share antibiotic medications?

You may not have the same type of infection as the person given the prescription, so there may be a more effective or more specific medication for your particular infection.

What other precautions can I take to help?

Prevention of illness is always the best treatment so:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Wash fruit and vegetables
- Stay up to date with immunizations
- Keep your immune system strong with a healthy diet, exercise, and adequate sleep

Sources:

For more information go to:

www.cdc.gov

www.lovelace.com

www.acponline.org

www.fmgsturlock.com

www.in.gov