

# Infection Prevention and You



## Get smart about antibiotics . . . and antibiotic resistance!

It has been a common practice for decades – you get sick, you go to the doctor, you ask for antibiotics, and you get a prescription (whether you need it or not); you feel better in a couple of days and you stop taking the antibiotic. Sound familiar?

The discovery of antibiotics in the 1920s changed the face of medicine forever. Penicillin started it and the industry has grown with leaps and bounds. Antibiotics were prescribed for anything that seemed infection-related. However, this practice has us in trouble now because there are many bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotics. Because of overuse and improper use for so many years, the bacteria have become smart and they have adapted (or mutated) to let themselves continue to multiply and spread. Some of the bacteria are resistant to just one group (also known as family) of antibiotics but there are some bacteria that are resistant to many families. These we call **multidrug-resistant organisms** and unfortunately, we're seeing more of them.

### What is happening in healthcare to prevent resistance?

Physicians are being more careful now when prescribing antibiotics. They are doing more tests to ensure that an antibiotic is needed in the first place. You don't need an antibiotic for a cold or the flu or for most coughs or even some earaches. If you do have something that needs to be treated with an antibiotic, physicians are being careful to choose more specific antibiotics for the bacteria instead of broad-spectrum antibiotics (antibiotics that kill a wide range of disease-causing bacteria). In many hospitals, Antibiotic Stewardship Programs are in place so that the pharmacy can help physicians order the right antibiotic for patients. There are even some instances with these programs that physicians are not allowed to order certain antibiotics without it being cleared by a pharmacist and/or an Infectious Diseases specialist physician.

### What can you do to prevent resistance?

Ask questions! Ask your doctor if you need an antibiotic for your illness. If you don't need one, ask what you can do to feel better. Do not pressure your doctor for a prescription. If you are prescribed an antibiotic, make sure to take it exactly as directed and take all of it! Do not take an antibiotic that was prescribed for someone else. It may not be the right kind of medicine for your illness. Another thing you can do is prevent the spread of germs by washing your hands. Soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers will kill the germs that will make us sick. And be sure to get recommended immunizations.

Antibiotics are great...if you need them. They make us feel better and get rid of infections. We just have to remember to respect them and use them wisely. If we don't, the bacteria just might win.

### Additional resources

CDC – Get Smart Know When Antibiotics Work <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/>

APIC – Ask questions about your medications <http://consumers.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-in/healthcare-settings/ask-questions-about-your-medications/>

CDC – Antibiotic resistance <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/index.html>

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