



# INFECTION PREVENTION & YOU

## DO YOU REALLY NEED AN ANTIBIOTIC?

Antibiotic resistance is one of the most urgent threats to the public's health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that each year in the United States, at least 2.8 million infections occur from bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics and at least 35,000 people die as a direct result of these infections.

Inappropriate use of antibiotics contributes to the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections. The CDC estimates that 30 percent of the antibiotics prescribed in outpatient clinics are not necessary. Although antibiotics can be very helpful when correctly used, they do not work on illnesses such as colds or the flu because they are caused by a virus. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections, not viral infections.

### What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are life-saving drugs first used during World War II to treat bacterial infections. Before the discovery of these miracle drugs, many people became very ill or died as a result of bacterial infections.

### What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria change in a way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of antibiotics. When bacteria become resistant, antibiotics cannot fight them, and the bacteria multiply. Some resistant bacteria can be hard or impossible to treat and can spread to other people. People who develop antibiotic-resistant infections are more likely to need hospitalization and are at increased risk for death.

## Take antibiotics exactly as your prescriber recommends. If you don't finish a course of antibiotics, harmful bacteria can grow.

- Only take antibiotics prescribed for you—do not share or use leftover antibiotics.
- Don't save antibiotics for next illness. Antibiotics treat specific types of infections. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.
- Discard leftover medication once the prescribed treatment course is completed. They should never be flushed down the toilet. To learn more about disposing of unused medication, contact your local pharmacy.
- Don't ask your healthcare provider for antibiotics when he/she says you don't need them.

## Know when antibiotics work—and when they don't.

Antibiotics work for bacterial infections, but they don't help you get over a viral infection. That means antibiotics will not help reduce symptoms caused by the common cold or the flu. Antibiotics are also often unnecessary for ear infections, sore throats, and sinus infections.

It all comes down to [knowing your ABC's of antibiotics](#) and asking your healthcare provider the following questions:

- Do I really need an antibiotic?
- Can I get better without this antibiotic?
- What side effects or drug interactions can I expect?
- What side effects should I report to you?
- How do you know what kind of infection I have? I understand that antibiotics won't work for viral infections.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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*#2 Antibiotics: Too much of a good thing?* [Podcast]. APIC; 2019.

<https://5secondruleshow.org/episode/2-antibiotics-too-much-good-thing/>

APIC—ABC's of antibiotics: <http://consumers.site.apic.org/files/2014/09/AntibioticInfographic14-FINAL.pdf>

APIC (Infection Prevention and You)—Ask questions about your medications:

<http://professionals.site.apic.org/infection-prevention-basics/ask-about-your-medication/>

CDC—Antibiotic/antimicrobial resistance: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/index.html>

CDC—Antibiotic prescribing and use: <https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/index.html>

CDC—Antibiotic resistance threats in the United States, 2019:

<https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/pdf/threats-report/2019-ar-threats-report-508.pdf>

CDC—Antibiotic use in the United States 2018 Update: Progress and opportunities:

<https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/stewardship-report/pdf/stewardship-report-2018-508.pdf>

CDC—Common illnesses. Will antibiotics help for these common infections?

<https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/for-patients/common-illnesses/index.html?>