

What are Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are powerful medications used to treat infections caused by *bacteria*. They do **not** work against infections that are caused by *viruses*.

It's important to understand that both viruses and bacteria cause infections in the body, but antibiotics can only kill bacteria germs. They cannot fight against virus germs.

Antibiotic Resistance

Antibiotics work by killing bacteria or stopping them from growing. When some types of bacteria are resistant to antibiotics, it means that the antibiotics won't work to kill the infection caused by those bacteria germs. If an antibiotic doesn't work against an infection caused bacteria, then a doctor will probably try to use another type of antibiotic to kill those germs. Some bacteria however, are resistant to all kinds of antibiotics and are considered untreatable. This can be dangerous, as some infections caused by bacteria can be life threatening.

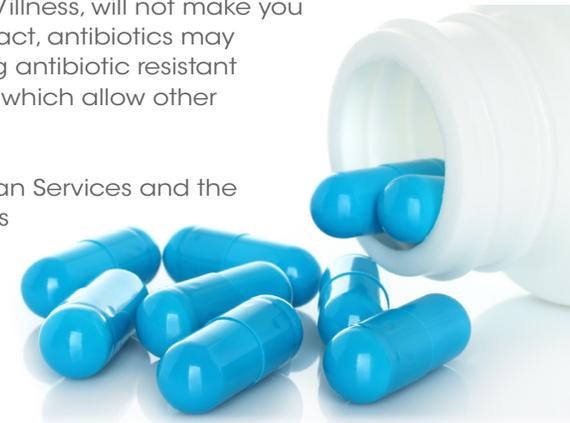
This resistance to antibiotics is due to antibiotics being prescribed too often and unnecessarily for viral infections. It is also caused by the incorrect usage of antibiotics by patients.

When receiving an antibiotic, be sure to understand why it's being prescribed, and follow guidelines to take the antibiotics exactly as prescribed.

When to Take Antibiotics

Antibiotics do not work against viral illnesses, so antibiotics should only be prescribed to treat bacterial infections. The common cold, flu, many ear and sinus infections, and most sore throats are actually caused by viruses. Taking antibiotics for a virus will not cure the infection/illness, will not make you feel better and will not keep others from catching the illness. In fact, antibiotics may even be harmful because it can increase your risk of developing antibiotic resistant infections, as well as destroying the good bacteria in your body, which allow other harmful bacteria to flourish.

The chart below is from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC (2015), and shows common illnesses, what typically causes the illness (bacteria or a virus) and whether or not antibiotics are needed for that illness. It's important to note that this chart only shows the 'usual cause' and that coughs, chest colds and sinus infections, and many ear infections can in fact be caused by bacteria. In those cases, antibiotics may be needed, so check with your doctor if symptoms persist.



ILLNESS	USUAL CAUSE	ANTIBIOTIC NEEDED
Cold / Runny Nose	Virus	No
Bronchitis / Chest Cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)	Virus	No
Whooping Cough	Bacteria	Yes
Flu	Virus	No
Strep Throat	Bacteria	Yes
Sore Throat (except strep)	Virus	No
Fluid in the Middle Ear (otitis media with effusion)	Virus	No
Urinary Tract Infection	Bacteria	Yes

Using Antibiotics Safely

1. **Bacterial vs. Viral Infections:** Take antibiotics only for infections caused by bacteria. If you have a virus, do not pressure your doctor to prescribe you antibiotics.
2. **Safe Usage:** When being prescribed antibiotics, finish the full dosage prescribed by your doctor. Do not discontinue taking your prescribed dosage of antibiotics just because you begin to feel better.
3. **Adverse Reactions:** While antibiotics are generally safe, some people can experience side effects and allergic reactions. Ask your doctor about common side effects and discuss any current or previous allergies to medications. Common side effects from antibiotics include nausea, diarrhea and stomach pain.

What Women Need to Know

There are a few side effects that are particularly important for women to be aware of when taking antibiotics.

1. Antibiotics kill the normal bacteria in the vagina, which then allows yeast to grow rapidly. This can result in a **yeast infection**. If you notice symptoms such as itching, burning, discharge or pain during intercourse, inform your doctor.
2. Antibiotics can cause **birth control pills** to be less effective, so you may want to use another form of birth control while taking antibiotics.
3. If you are **pregnant or nursing**, tell your doctor. Some antibiotics can be transmitted to the fetus and may cause harm.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Q: Why do I need antibiotics and what is it supposed to do?

A:

Q: What are the side effects of the antibiotic and does it interfere with my other medications? What should I do if I notice any bad reactions or side effects?

A:

Q: When, how and for how long should I take the antibiotics? (i.e. What time of day? With or without food?)

A:

RESOURCES

Women's Choice Award: **America's Best Hospitals for Patient Safety:** www.WomensChoiceAward.com

CDC. **Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work:** <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community/index.html>

National Institutes of Health: Antibiotics <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/antibiotics.html>



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Sources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community>
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http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/about_issue/when_howshtml

Disclaimer: This content is for informational purposes only and is not intended to provide medical advice or to treat, diagnose, cure or prevent any disease or condition. Always seek the advice of your healthcare provider.



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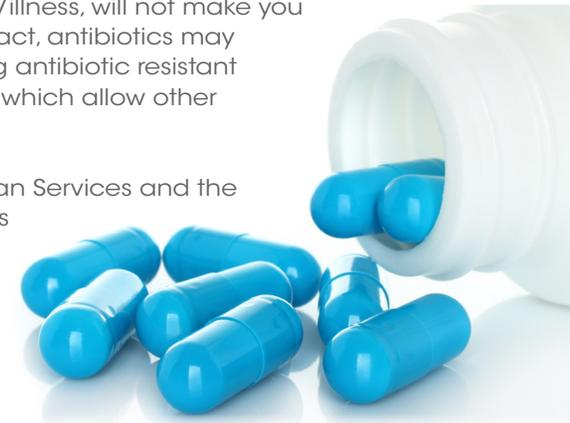
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