



## PATIENT - CONSUMER INFORMATION ON PRUDENT USE OF ANTIBIOTICS

Antibiotics are a medical treasure, but they are being misused. In some cases, they are taken when they are not needed at all; in others, they are prescribed and used inappropriately. Misuse has led to the decreased effectiveness of antibiotics because of the emergence of bacteria that are resistant to them. **Antibiotics should not be used for infections caused by viruses, such as the common cold and flu.**

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### What is Antibiotic Resistance?

- If you take antibiotics and don't need them, they lose their strength and ability to kill bacteria. This is because each time you take antibiotics, the sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones are left to grow and multiply.
- Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem. This means that a practitioner's first choice of an antibiotic is working less often, and there are more treatment failures.
- Overuse and misuse of antibiotics increase the growth and spread of these resistant bacteria. With the onset of bioterrorism, it is even more important that we preserve the power of antibiotics so that they will work when we need them most.

### What Can I Do to Help?

- Live a healthy and balanced, smoke-free lifestyle with rest, fluids, exercise, nutrition and fun.
- Never take antibiotics for viral infections, like colds or flu.
- Don't insist on an antibiotic if your health care practitioner doesn't think one is necessary. **More than 50 percent of all antibiotics prescribed are unnecessary.**
- If your health care practitioner prescribes an antibiotic, take it exactly as written on the label. Take **ALL** the medication even if you are feeling better. If you stop your antibiotic early, the bacteria that have not yet been killed can restart an infection.
- Never share your antibiotic or save it for later use. A course of antibiotics can range from 3 to 14 days and longer for some infections.
- **Wash your hands** often, especially after coughing, sneezing, and going to the bathroom. Recent research has shown that antibacterial soaps are no more effective than regular soap in reducing infections.
- Check with your pediatrician to make sure that your children's **immunizations** are up to date.
- By using antibiotics wisely, you will help preserve a healthy future for yourself, your loved ones, and for millions of others around the world.

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## When Do I Need An Antibiotic?

**The best way to know when to take an antibiotic is by talking with your health care practitioner. Remember that viruses cause most of the common colds and flu-like symptoms. Only bacteria respond to antibiotics.**

Illness/Symptoms	Usual Cause		Antibiotic Needed?
	Virus	Bacteria	
Colds (e.g., sore throat, runny nose, post-nasal drip, cough, fever, laryngitis, sinus congestion, colored nasal discharge and headache)	X		No <sup>1</sup>
Cough and Bronchitis	X		No <sup>2</sup>
Ear Pain	X	X	Sometimes <sup>3</sup>
Flu (e.g., similar to those for colds PLUS aches and pain, chills, fever up to 103 degrees, and sensitivity to light)	X		No <sup>1</sup>
Runny Nose	X		No
Sinus Infection	X	X	Sometimes <sup>4</sup>
Sore Throat	X		No <sup>5</sup>
Strep Throat		X	Yes <sup>6</sup>
Urinary Tract Infection		X	Yes

<sup>1</sup> If you have a respiratory illness of unusual severity or duration, your infection may be caused by bacteria. In these cases, your physician may decide to treat you with an antibiotic.

<sup>2</sup> Contact your health care practitioner if you have a prolonged cough.

<sup>3</sup> There are several types of ear infections. Antibiotics are effective for most, but not all, ear infections.

<sup>4</sup> Even if you have a runny nose, or yellow or green mucus coming from your nose, you may not need an antibiotic. Antibiotics should only be used for severe infections or infections that last more than two weeks, since these may be caused by bacteria.

<sup>5</sup> Most sore throats, particularly those associated with a runny nose and cough, are caused by viruses and cannot be cured by antibiotics.

<sup>6</sup> Strep throat is caused by bacteria and requires treatment with antibiotics. Your physician can do a throat swab to determine whether you have strep throat and need an antibiotic.

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Sources:

Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) [www.apua.org](http://www.apua.org)  
 Arkansas Foundation for Medical Care (AFMC) [www.afmc.org](http://www.afmc.org)  
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 Council for Affordable Quality HealthCare (CAQH) [www.caqh.org](http://www.caqh.org)  
 Michigan Antibiotic Resistance Reduction Coalition (MARR) [www.mi-marr.org](http://www.mi-marr.org)  
 Tufts Health Care Institute (THCI) [www.thci.org](http://www.thci.org)  
 World Health Organization (WHO) [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)