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Antibiotics Aren't Always the Answer

Antibiotics do not fight infections caused by viruses like colds, most sore throats and bronchitis, and some ear infections. Unneeded antibiotics may lead to future antibiotic-resistant infections. Symptom relief might be the best treatment option.

Dangers of Antibiotic Resistance

Colds and many other upper respiratory infections, as well as some ear infections, are caused by viruses, not bacteria. If antibiotics are used too often for things they can't treat—like colds or other viral infections—they can stop working effectively against bacteria when you or your child really needs them. Antibiotic resistance—when antibiotics can no longer cure bacterial infections—has been a concern for years and is considered one of the world's most critical public health threats.

CDC efforts have resulted in fewer children receiving unnecessary antibiotics in recent years, but inappropriate use remains a problem. Widespread overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics continues to fuel an increase in antibiotic-resistant bacteria. So the next time you or your child really needs an antibiotic for a bacterial infection, it may not work.

Antibiotic resistance is also an economic burden on the entire healthcare system. Resistant infections cost more to treat and can prolong healthcare use.

If You or Your Child Has a Virus Like a Cold or Sore Throat

Taking antibiotics when you or your child has a virus may do more harm than good. In fact, in children, antibiotics are the most common cause of emergency department visits for adverse drug events. Rest, fluids, and over-the-counter products may be your or your child's best treatment option.

Get smart about when antibiotics are appropriate—to fight bacterial infections. Taking them for viral infections, such as a cold, most sore throats, acute bronchitis and many sinus or ear infections:

- Will **not** cure the infection;
- Will **not** keep other people from getting sick;
- Will **not** help you or your child feel better; and
- May cause unnecessary and harmful side effects.

What Not to Do

- Do **not** demand antibiotics when a doctor says they are not needed.
- Do **not** take an antibiotic for a viral infection like a cold or most sore throats.
- Do **not** take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. The antibiotic may not be appropriate for your or your child's illness. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.

If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic for bacterial infection:

- Do **not** skip doses.
- Do **not** save any of the antibiotics for the next time you or your child gets sick.

What to Do

Just because your doctor doesn't give you an antibiotic doesn't mean you aren't sick.

Talk with your doctor about the best treatment for your or your child's illness. To feel better when you or your child has an upper respiratory infection:

- Ask your doctor or community pharmacist about over-the-counter treatment options that may help you or your child feel better;
- Increase fluid intake;
- Get plenty of rest;
- Use a cool-mist vaporizer or saline nasal spray to relieve congestion; and
- Soothe a throat with ice chips, sore throat spray, or lozenges (do not give lozenges to young children).

Video: Snort. Sniffle. Sneeze. No Antibiotics Please!

- CDC created a video to help you learn more about appropriate antibiotic use and how to feel better when you or your child has a sore throat, ear or sinus pain, fever, cough, or runny nose. This video features a doctor, who is also a concerned mom. You can [download the video at CDC-TV](#), [download the podcast](#), or access on your mobile phone.

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