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Healthy Insights

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What Everyone Should Know About Antibiotics

Antibiotics are an important tool to treat infections caused by bacteria. However, they need to be used at the right time, for the right reasons.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines that are used for treatment against infections caused by bacteria and certain parasites. A parasite is a type of germ that needs to live on or in another living being. Antibiotics are sometimes called antibacterials or antimicrobials. They can be taken by mouth, given by injection, or applied directly to certain skin infections.

In some cases, antibiotics may be given to prevent rather than treat an infection, as might be the case before surgery. This is called “prophylactic” use of antibiotics. They are commonly used before bowel and orthopedic surgery.



What *do* antibiotics treat?

Antibiotics are only used to treating certain infections caused by bacteria. They are important for treating common infections such as pneumonia and life-threatening infections such as sepsis.

What *do* antibiotics *not* treat?

Antibiotics do not work on viruses. They will not work on a common cold, flu, or even a runny nose. Antibiotics also have no effect on certain infections such as bronchitis, many sinus infections and some ear infections that are caused by viruses.

This information has been adapted by IPRO from the following:
<https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/about/index.html>
<https://patient.info/health/antibiotics-leaflet>

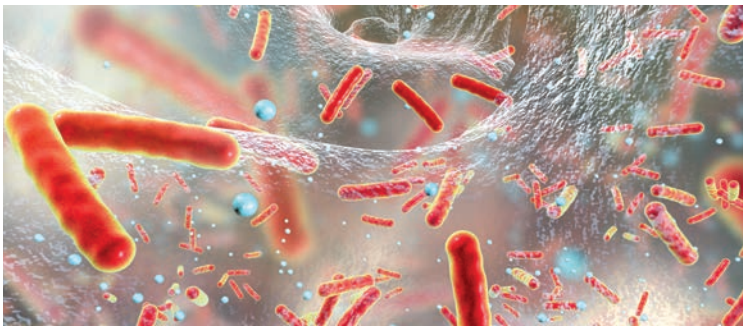
When to take (or not to take) antibiotics

Knowing when you may need an antibiotic depends on the kind of infection you have.

The first step is to talk to your doctor to determine whether your infection is bacterial or viral.

What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change and the drugs that are used to cure or prevent infections no longer work. The bacteria survive and continue to multiply, sometimes causing illnesses that were once treatable with antibiotics. Most antibiotics start having an effect on an infection within a few hours. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can create antibiotic-resistant bacteria. When your doctor prescribes antibiotics you **MUST** finish all the medicine to prevent the infection from coming back. If you stop the medication before the end of the treatment the bacteria can become resistant to future treatments.



Antibiotics can be disease-fighting and life-saving, but must be used as prescribed by your healthcare provider.



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IPRO Healthy Insights
1979 Marcus Avenue
Lake Success, NY 11042
(516) 209-5262

NEVER...



- ✗ Take an antibiotic for a viral infection.
- ✗ Skip doses.
- ✗ Save antibiotics for the next time that you become sick.
- ✗ Take antibiotics prescribed for someone else.
- ✗ Demand antibiotics from your doctor.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about your antibiotics, or if you experience any side effects.

IPRO Healthy Insights is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, and a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 30 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.

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