

What are Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines that kill bacteria (germs which cause infections). But sometimes not all of the bacteria are stopped or killed. The strongest ones can grow and spread. A person can get sick again. This time the germs are harder to kill.

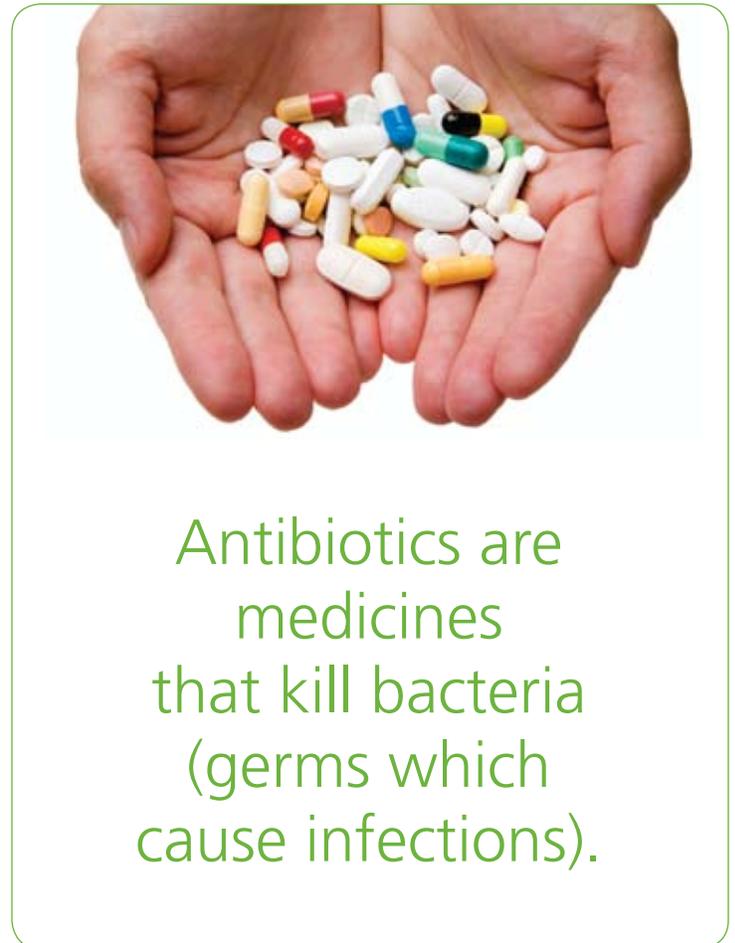
The more often you use an antibiotic, the more likely it is that the germs will resist it. This can make some diseases very hard to control. It can make you sick longer and need more doctor visits. You may need to take drugs that are even stronger.

Bacteria and viruses are the two main types of germs. They cause most sickness. Antibiotics can kill bacteria, but they do not work against viruses. Viruses cause:

- Colds
- Coughs
- Sore throats
- Flu
- Runny noses
- Sinus problems
- Bronchitis
- Ear infections

These illnesses often go away by themselves. Ask your provider what you can do to feel better.

- If you have a virus, taking antibiotics is not a good plan.
- Antibiotics don't work against viruses.
- If you take antibiotics when you do not need them, they may not work when you do need them.



How Can I Help to Make Sure that Antibiotics are the Best Treatment for Me?

Be smart about using antibiotics. Know that antibiotics can help treat infections caused by bacteria but not by viruses.

What you can do to make sure antibiotics will work when you need them:

- Always ask your provider if antibiotics are the best treatment.
- Do not use antibiotics that were prescribed for a different sickness or for someone else.
- Protect yourself from germs. Wash your hands well with soap and clean, running water.
- Get a flu vaccine and other vaccines when you need them.

Questions you can ask your provider:

- Why do I need antibiotics?
- What are the side effects of this antibiotic?
- Can I do anything to avoid the side effects?
- How do I take the antibiotic? Do I take it at a certain time of day? Do I take it with food?
- Will anything happen if I take it with other medicines, certain foods, or alcohol?
- Do I need to keep the antibiotics in the fridge? Are there any special storage instructions?

If you need to take antibiotics, always tell your provider or pharmacist about other medicines or supplements you are taking. Be sure to talk about any food or drug allergies, and any health problems you have. And make sure your provider knows if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.

When your provider prescribes an antibiotic:

- Always take the exact amount that the label says to take. If it says to take the medicine at a certain time, do so.
- Take it for as long as you are told to. Make sure you take all of the medicine, even if you feel better after a few days.
- Never take antibiotics without a prescription. If you have antibiotics leftover from another time when you were sick, do not take them. The leftover antibiotics might not work on whatever is making you sick.
- Taking antibiotics you do not need will not help you feel better, cure your illness, or keep others from catching your infection. But taking them may cause harmful side effects. Common side effects are nausea, diarrhea, and stomach pain.

Sources:

www.FDA.gov

www.WebMD.com

www.FamilyDoctor.org