**Antibiotics: When You Need Them, When You Don’t, and What to Take When You Don’t**

✓ Check if your symptoms are likely caused by viruses or bacteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Common symptoms</th>
<th>Viral</th>
<th>Bacterial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronchitis</td>
<td>Cough, clear or green mucus, no or low fever (100°F-101°F), occasional wheezing, chest soreness, short of breath</td>
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<td>Rarely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common cold (upper respiratory infection)</td>
<td>Runny nose, nasal stuffiness and congestion, facial pressure, cough, chills, body aches, low fever (100°F-101°F), scratchy throat, sneezing, headache, watery eyes, tiredness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ear infection (acute otitis media)</td>
<td>Ear pain; red, bulging eardrum; fever (≥ 100°F); discharge from ear; fluid may collect in inner ear, causing feeling of fullness in ear(s), muffled hearing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>Cough, short of breath, fever (≥ 100°F), chest pain when taking a deep breath, tiredness, bluish lips from low oxygen in the blood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sore throat</td>
<td>Throat burning/pain, hard to swallow. Symptoms of a cold (see above) may also be present.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strep throat</td>
<td>Sore throat, fever (≥ 101°F-102°F), white patches on tonsils, enlarged lymph nodes, upset stomach; there is usually no cough, runny nose, or diarrhea.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If your illness is probably

- **Viral**: Make an appointment to see your health care provider if you don’t feel better or if you feel worse after a few days.
- **Bacterial**: Make an appointment to see your health care provider as soon as possible.

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**For Illness Caused by a Virus**

There are many helpful OTC medicines and things you can do at home to improve your symptoms and make you feel better.

**OTC medicines**

- Ibuprofen, naproxen, and acetaminophen can lower fever and relieve pain (sore throat, body aches, sinus pain).
- Throat lozenges and sprays can ease throat pain and irritation.
- Decongestants, such as Sudafed* and Sudafed PE,* help relieve a stuffy nose and sinuses.
  
  * If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, ask your health care provider or pharmacist about safe decongestant choices for you.
- Mucolytics and antitussives, found in Mucinex DM or Robitussin DM, can thin and loosen chest congestion and reduce coughing.
- Saline nasal sprays (eg, Ayr, Naturade) or nasal saline irrigation (Simply Saline Neti Pot Kit, NeilMed Sinus Rinse) can “unstuff” and soothe your nose.

**Home remedies**

- Cool mist humidifiers may be useful to moisten the air and make it more comfortable to breathe so you can rest and sleep.
- A warm mist vaporizer, especially with a medicated inhalant (eg, Vicks VapoSteam), may relieve chest congestion and cough.
- Liquids (water, juice, soups, tea) thin mucus and may help you feel less congested. Drink liquids without a lot of caffeine.

(Over)
• Rest is important. Take naps and if you have a fever, stay home from work or other activities.

**Tips to avoid spreading your illness**
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Don’t let anyone eat or drink from the same dishes or use the same utensils you’ve used.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing; dispose of used tissues carefully. If you don’t have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- Stay home when you’re sick. Especially avoid the very young, the elderly, and others who are sick.

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**Antibiotics Do’s and Don’ts**

If you receive a prescription for antibiotics, here are some important things to know.

- **Do** finish all the pills you receive; don’t stop taking the medicine when you begin to feel better and don’t save some for “next time.”
  *If you don’t finish all the medicine, some bacteria survive and your infection may come back.*

- **Don’t** take someone else’s prescription.
  *Unless you’re a health care provider, you can’t diagnose yourself; you don’t know if what you have is the same as what someone else has.*

- **Don’t** share your prescription with someone else.
  *See the two items above.*

- **Don’t** double the next dose if you forget to take a dose.
  *It’s not safe to take more medicine at once than your health care provider prescribed. If you forget to take a dose, then take it as soon as you can.*

**And remember…**
- **Don’t** take antibiotics for viral infections. They’re only effective against bacteria, not viruses, so they won’t help you get better from a viral infection. You don’t need them.

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**Why is it so important not to take antibiotics when you don’t need them?**

- Although antibiotics kill bacteria, a few will survive. These bacteria are antibiotic resistant and can grow, multiply, and spread to other people.

- Sometimes antibiotics kill “good” bacteria that prevent other infections. This can cause other illnesses to develop, such as vaginal or oral fungus infections and *Clostridium difficile colitis*. There’s no reason to risk these side effects if you have a viral infection.

- Eventually, an antibiotic that once worked to treat bacterial infections no longer does because the bacteria have become resistant to that antibiotic.

- Illnesses can last longer, causing more doctor visits and hospital stays; stronger drugs with more serious side effects must be used; and in some cases, people die from antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections.

- The best way to reduce the number of bacteria that are becoming resistant to antibiotics is to take antibiotics only when they’re needed—in other words, to treat bacterial infections.

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**How Antibiotic Resistance Happens**

1. **Lots of germs.** A few are drug resistant.
2. **Antibiotics kill bacteria causing the illness, as well as good bacteria protecting the body from infection.**
- Some bacteria give their drug-resistance to other bacteria, causing more problems.

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Source: CDC / Melissa Brower