

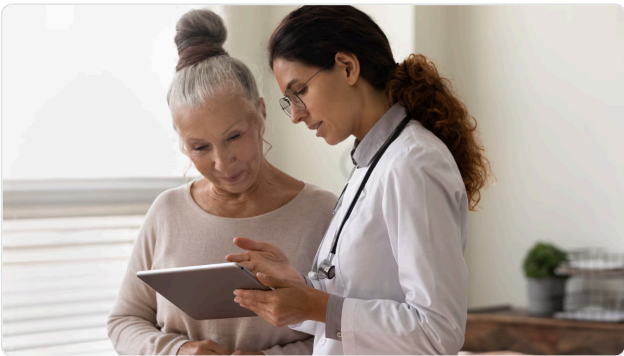


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# Healthy Habits: Antibiotic Do's and Don'ts

KEY POINTS

- Antibiotics can save lives, but they aren't always the answer.
- Take these steps to use antibiotics appropriately so you can get the best treatment when you're sick, protect yourself from side effects caused by unnecessary antibiotic use and combat antimicrobial resistance.



MORE INFORMATION

- For Everyone
- Health Care Providers
- Public Health

## Take antibiotics ONLY when you need them

Antibiotics ONLY treat certain infections caused by bacteria, such as:

- [Strep throat](#)
- Whooping cough
- [Urinary tract infection \(UTI\)](#)

Some infections caused by bacteria can still get better without antibiotics. You DO NOT need antibiotics for some common bacterial infections, including many [sinus infections](#) and some [ear infections](#).

Antibiotics DO NOT work on viruses.

Viruses are germs different from bacteria. Antibiotics do not treat infections caused by viruses such as those that cause:

- Colds and runny noses, even if the mucus is thick, yellow or green
- Most [sore throats](#) (except strep throat)
- Flu
- Most cases of chest colds ([bronchitis](#))

Antibiotics will NOT make you feel better if you have a virus.

Taking antibiotics when you do not need them will not help you, and their side effects can still cause harm. Talk to a healthcare professional about the best treatment for you when you are sick. Never pressure a healthcare professional to prescribe an antibiotic.

Reminder

Antibiotics aren't always the answer when you're sick. Ask a healthcare professional for tips on how to feel better while your body fights off an infection.



## Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed

If antibiotics are the best treatment when you're sick:

- Take them exactly as prescribed.

- Do not share your antibiotics with others.
- Do not save them for later. Taking the wrong medicine for a future illness may delay correct treatment and can cause severe side effects.
- Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. This may delay the best treatment for you, make you even sicker or cause side effects.

**Reminder**

Talk to a healthcare professional if you have any questions about your antibiotics.



## Disposal of medicines

For any expired or unused medications:

- Dispose through drug take-back programs, often located within community pharmacies.
- Place in a plastic bag with dirt, kitty litter or used coffee grounds and throw away in the household trash.

Talk to a pharmacist about safely discarding leftover medicines. See helpful [tips on how to safely throw away unused medications](#)

## Talk to a healthcare provider about side effects of antibiotics

If a healthcare professional determines that you need antibiotics, the benefits usually outweigh the risks of side effects and antimicrobial resistance. Common side effects of antibiotics range from minor to very severe health problems and can include:

- Rash
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Yeast infections

More serious side effects can include:

- [C. diff infection](#), which causes diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and deaths.
- Severe and life-threatening allergic reactions
- [Antimicrobial-resistant infections](#)

**Children and side effects**

In children, side effects from antibiotics are the most common cause of medication-related emergency department visits.



Call a healthcare professional if you or your child develop any side effects while taking an antibiotic.

## Stay healthy and keep others healthy

- [Clean your hands](#) by washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home when you're sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who have colds or other upper respiratory infections.
- Get recommended vaccines, such as the [flu vaccine](#).

SOURCES

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