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It is important to seek medical help if a fever lasts more than three to five days or if the symptoms continue to worsen.

BACTERIAL INFECTIONS. Antibiotics can help one feel better faster and in some cases avoid potentially severe complications when the cause of the illness is a bacterial infection. Some of the more common bacterial infections are ear infections, strep throat, and sinus infections. These are illnesses that respond well to antibiotics.

WHEN TO SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION. Other bacterial infections can become quite severe if not attended to promptly and treated appropriately. Visit your doctor if you experience worsening or a rebound of symptoms that seemed to have been starting to resolve. For example, ear pain or trouble hearing that begins five to seven days after the onset of a cold, or a fever that just won't go away after three to five days.

Severe infections such as pneumonia can hit hard and fast and are characterized by high fever and more severe cough. Another alarming symptom is fever, headache, and stiff neck. One should seek immediate attention for these symptoms.

Most of the time the immune system will take care of what is ailing you with time, rest, and patience. Stay alert to "alarm" symptoms and seek help when necessary.

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Watch for the following
ALARM
Symptoms

Persistent fever lasting more than three to five days

Ear pain or trouble hearing that begins five to seven days after the onset of a cold

Worsening or rebound of symptoms that seemed to have started to resolve

COLDS, FLU, AND ANTIBIOTICS

Infections come in two categories: viruses and bacteria.

By Nordell T. Brown, MD

Getting sick is the worst; any busy person or parent wants nothing more than for those miserable symptoms to be gone and gone fast. Naturally, many people quickly start to wonder if an antibiotic would help. Infections come in two large categories: viruses and bacteria.

VIRUSES. In general terms there are no reliable medications available to treat viral infections, especially common viral upper respiratory infections, like colds, and flu or influenza. For these illnesses it is best to provide supportive care and wait for the body to take care of the infection on its own. Fortunately, the immune system is well prepared

for these illnesses and, given a little time, will take care of things quite nicely.

Taking an antibiotic for viral infections is ineffective and can lead to more health care expenses and side effects. Some antiviral medications are available and can help treat influenza, but only if they are started within the first 48 hours. The best treatment for flu is prevention; a yearly flu shot is the best defense against flu.

MANAGING THE SYMPTOMS. In most cases, viral illnesses last no more than seven to ten days and, listening to the advice of Mom and Grandma, most feel better with rest and fluids. Manage your fever with fever reducers when necessary.

