Intermountain Health

Antibiotics: What you need to know and do

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics [an-ti-bi-OT-iks] are medicines that fight infections caused by **bacteria** [bak-TEER-ee-uh]. Antibiotics work by killing these kinds of germs or by keeping them from spreading in your body.

When are antibiotics helpful?

Antibiotics are **ONLY** helpful when fighting infections caused by bacteria. Common infections that may be treated with antibiotics include infections of the lungs, skin, bladder, and abdomen (belly).

When are antibiotics NOT helpful?

Antibiotics are **NOT** helpful when fighting infections caused by other kinds of germs such as **viruses** [VAHY-ruh-siz] or **fungi** [FUHN-jahy]. Some common infections that **CANNOT** be treated with antibiotics include colds, the flu, and most sinus and airway infections.

What are the side effects?

Common side effects of antibiotics include:

- Mild nausea
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Women may have a greater chance of getting a yeast infection

Serious side effects of antibiotics include:

- Allergic reactions
- Severe diarrhea

When should I call a doctor?

Call a doctor right away if you have any of these signs of a serious side effect:

Allergic reaction

- Rash, itching, or hives
- Swelling in your face, hands, mouth, or throat
- Chest tightness or trouble breathing

Severe diarrhea

- 3 or more watery stools per day
- Diarrhea that does not stop
- Bloody diarrhea

Severe diarrhea may be serious and must be treated quickly. DO NOT take any medicine — such as bismuth subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol) or loperamide hydrochloride (Imodium) — to stop the diarrhea until talking with your doctor.

What are other risks?

In addition to side effects, taking an antibiotic has these other risks:

- **Reactions with other medicines.** Antibiotics may interfere with other medicines such as warfarin (Coumadin). Tell your healthcare provider about other medicines you are taking. **Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nursing staff if this antibiotic will interact with any of your other medicines, vitamins, or supplements.**
- **Antibiotic Resistance.** Taking an antibiotic increases the chance of getting an infection in the future that may be resistant to that antibiotic. Antibiotic-resistant infections may be harder to treat and can lead to serious health problems or even death. **Take this antibiotic exactly as directed by your healthcare provider.**

Why are treatments shorter than in the past?

Research shows that taking antibiotics for a shorter time still works well for many common infections. Shorter treatments can also help reduce side effects. If you have taken antibiotics before, this may be why your treatment plan looks different now.

What else should I know?

Before going home, be sure to:

- ☐ Review all your medicines with your provider.
- ☐ Pick up your prescription from the pharmacy as soon as possible. Let your doctor know if you are unable to afford the medicine.
- ☐ Find out when your next doctor's visit is planned.
- ☐ Find out how to store your medicine.

To keep you and others safe:

- ☐ **DO NOT** stop taking the antibiotic early unless your provider tells you to — even if you are feeling better.
- ☐ **DO NOT** use more medicine than directed.
- ☐ **DO NOT** share your antibiotics with anyone.
- ☐ **DO NOT** take extra doses of your medicine to make up for a missed dose. If you miss one, take it as soon as possible. If it's almost time for your next dose, wait and take the next dose as scheduled.

Other questions for my doctor, pharmacist, or nurse:

- What infection is this antibiotic treating? _____
- How long do I need to take this antibiotic? _____
- Should I take this antibiotic with food? _____
- Should I avoid alcohol while taking this antibiotic? _____
- Are there additional side effects that I need to be aware of? _____

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- How can I tell my infection is getting better? _____

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- Who do I call with questions about my infection or antibiotic? _____

_____

- Other notes: _____

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