

# Antibiotics: What you need to know and do

## What are antibiotics?

**Antibiotics** [an-ti-bahy-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.**

## 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? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How can I tell my infection is getting better? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Who do I call with questions about my infection or antibiotic? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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