

Don't Take Antibiotics for Granted

It's easy to see why antibiotics are helpful, and now you know why sometimes you or a family member may not need them. You can help yourself and others by taking antibiotics only when they are needed.

AHRQ Safety Program for Long-Term Care: HAIs/CAUTI

This program supports long-term care facilities in adopting evidence-based practices to reduce catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTI) and other healthcare-associated infections (HAI) and improve their safety culture. Antimicrobial stewardship, or making better choices about when to use antibiotics, is one component of this safety program for long-term care facilities.

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When Do You Need An Antibiotic?



Taking antibiotics when you don't need them is like leaving the lights on all the time.

Adapted from a brochure developed by The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Resources for You

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/longtermcare/resident/index.html>

FDA: www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM078484

The lights may burn out, leaving you in the dark when you most need them.

If you use antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you get sick.



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Antibiotics: Powerful Drugs, But Only When Used for the Right Reasons

Antibiotic drugs are strong medicine that can save lives when used appropriately to treat bacterial infections. Overuse of antibiotics can cause problems for individuals and for the health of the community. It is important for us all that these powerful drugs are used only when they can help, so they will work when we really need them.

Overusing Antibiotics Can Cause Problems

What are possible side effects of antibiotics?

Antibiotics can, in some cases—



Cause nausea and vomiting



Cause diarrhea, including the kind due to *Clostridium difficile*, an infection that can lead to severe symptoms



Cause rash or other allergic reactions



Harm your kidneys or other organs



Cause bacteria to become resistant to antibiotics

What is “antibiotic resistance”?

Antibiotics are developed to kill germs, but the germs fight back by trying to make themselves immune to the antibiotics. When this happens, the antibiotic no longer kills the germ, and we say that the germ is “resistant” to the antibiotic. The more antibiotics people take, the more chances germs have of becoming resistant. That’s why it’s best to use an antibiotic only when it’s absolutely necessary.

When aren’t antibiotics needed?

Antibiotics can help the body fight bacterial infections, but they are not miracle drugs for everything.

They are not helpful when—



You have an infection that is caused by a virus (like a cold or the flu).



You don’t have an infection but instead have some other medical problem (such as anemia).



Bacteria are found in a urine culture from a specimen you gave, but you do not have symptoms of infection. Sometimes people can have bacteria in their urine without having an infection.

What should you do?



Talk with your doctor or nurse about the benefits and harms of antibiotics.



Work with your doctor or nurse to avoid all unnecessary medications.



Take all antibiotics as prescribed for as long as they are prescribed.

What shouldn’t you do?



Don’t request an antibiotic when your doctor or other provider says it isn’t needed.



Don’t take an antibiotic for a virus (cold or flu).