



Antibiotics Aren't Always Needed

Antibiotics are powerful medicines. However, they aren't always needed. Also, using them in the wrong way can cause serious problems.

Read on for information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about when antibiotics are needed, why your child's doctor won't prescribe an antibiotic, antibiotic resistance, and how to use antibiotics safely.

What's the cause of my child's illness?

Bacteria and viruses are 2 types of germs that can make your child sick. Common infections caused by bacteria include urinary tract infections and strep throat. Colds and flu are caused by viruses.

Some infections may be caused by either bacteria or viruses. Common infections caused by either bacteria or viruses include ear infections, pinkeye, and sinusitis.

When will my child need antibiotics?

Keep in mind that antibiotics treat only infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics do not treat infections caused by viruses.

Before an antibiotic is prescribed, your child's doctor will want to make sure that an antibiotic is the right medicine for your child. Your child's doctor will need to determine whether the cause of the infection is bacterial or it's viral. A decision will be made based on your child's health, signs and symptoms of his illness, where you live, and the time of year. You cannot get an antibiotic without a prescription.

Why won't my child's doctor prescribe an antibiotic?

Keep in mind that your child's doctor will prescribe an antibiotic only if needed. Antibiotics do not treat infections caused by viruses.

- Colds are caused by viruses. Most common cold symptoms—runny nose, cough, sore throat, and congestion—are mild and your child will get better without using any medicines. Keep in mind that if anything green or yellow comes out of your child's nose or is coughed up, your child may not need antibiotics.
- Flu is caused by viruses. Most children with the flu need nothing more than bed rest, a lot of fluids, and fever medicine to ease discomfort.

If you have any questions or concerns, ask your child's doctor.

What are the side effects of antibiotics?

Each year, more than half a million children go to the emergency department because of side effects of drugs. Antibiotics are the most common type of drugs that cause these emergencies. The risk of side effects is one reason to use antibiotics only when they are truly needed.

Some common side effects of antibiotics are

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Mild diarrhea

Less common side effects are

- Abdominal pain
- Allergic reactions
- Severe diarrhea, requiring hospitalization
- Nerve damage
- Seizures
- Inflammation or tearing of tendons (cords that connect bone and muscle)
- Blood cell changes, such as lowered white blood cell numbers
- Blood changes, such as slowed down blood clotting and bruising
- Stevens-Johnson syndrome (a painful, blistering rash)
- Irregular heartbeat or low blood pressure

If you have any concerns or questions about the side effects, contact your child's doctor.

What is antibiotic resistance?

Did you know that many doctors are concerned that in a few years, no antibiotics will be left that work against common bacteria? That is because bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics—the antibiotics will no longer work against them. Even if used correctly, antibiotics can cause resistant bacteria to develop and grow.

The risk of bacteria becoming resistant is another reason to use antibiotics only when they are truly needed.

What's the best way to give antibiotics to my child?

If your child's doctor prescribes an antibiotic, here are some health and safety tips to keep in mind.

- Make sure that you give the medicine exactly as directed. That means having your child take the recommended dose according to the schedule on the label (for example, 1, 2, or 3 times a day). If the medicine is a liquid, be sure to use a syringe or small cup with lines to measure out the medicine exactly.
- Store the antibiotic as directed. Some antibiotics need to be refrigerated.
- Your child needs to take all the antibiotic. This means that if your child's doctor prescribes taking the medicine for 10 days, be sure your child takes it for the full 10 days, even if he's feeling better before then.
- Never give your child antibiotics that were prescribed for another person or for an earlier illness. Any leftover antibiotics may be the wrong ones for the problem your child has, they may be expired, or you may not have enough for a complete course of treatment.

- Contact your doctor if your child doesn't get better or seems to be getting worse after taking the antibiotic for 3 full days. Sometimes the antibiotic might not be correct for the infection, or the bacteria might be resistant to the antibiotic. Your child's doctor may decide to prescribe a different antibiotic.
- Ask your child's doctor if he wants to see your child again after all the prescribed antibiotics are taken. Sometimes your child's doctor may want to check if the infection, such as an ear infection, is gone.

From Your Doctor

Remember

Antibiotics aren't always the answer when your child is sick. If you have any questions about your child's treatment, ask your child's doctor.

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