



Antibiotics

When antibiotics became widely available more than 50 years ago, they were hailed as a miracle cure. In many ways, they have been. Used to treat bacterial infections, antibiotics have saved countless lives, and prevented many serious complications.

However, in the decades that have followed, many types of bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics. This means that their genetic makeup—their DNA—has changed (mutated) in a way that makes drugs less effective against them. The resistant bacteria are able to survive, multiply, and continue to cause harm. Then they are difficult to treat, and may require more toxic or intravenous types of medication. And they can easily be passed to others, sometimes causing longer illnesses, disability, or even death.

Today, widespread antibiotic resistance is one of the most serious public health problems we face. That's because more and more strains of bacteria are resistant to an ever-increasing number of antibiotics. Here's a statistic that illustrates the seriousness of the situation: Patients acquire 2 million infections in U.S. hospitals each year, which lead to 90,000 deaths. Bacteria that are resistant to at least one antibiotic cause 70 percent of these infections.

What led to such a big problem? Although bacteria sometimes mutate naturally, the biggest cause is this: Antibiotics have been misused. They're often taken for common viruses, such as colds or flu, instead of for bacterial infections, for which they're intended. Or people don't take antibiotics as directed. Doing these things allows bacteria to thrive and become resistant. In addition, the overuse of antibacterial products such as soaps and lotions may be adding to the problem. In general, these products should be used in a hospital setting only or around people who have poor immune systems. Another possible contributor is the addition of antibiotics to agricultural feed.

What can you do to help counteract this problem? Plenty. For starters, don't demand antibiotics from your doctor unless it is certain you need them for a bacterial infection, such as strep throat or a urinary tract

infection. One study showed that doctors prescribe antibiotics 65 percent of the time if patients demand them, but only 12 percent of the time if patients don't expect to receive them.

Let colds, coughs, and the flu run their course, while finding other ways to relieve symptoms. Taking antibiotics for these viral infections won't cure them, keep others well, or help you feel any better. Even middle ear infections don't always require antibiotics, unless certain symptoms show up, such as fever, decreased appetite, trouble sleeping, or ear tugging. You should also know that yellow or green mucus is not always a sign of a bacterial infection. If you're concerned that one has developed, or if your illness worsens or lasts a long time, the best thing you can do is to communicate with your doctor.

Take antibiotics exactly as directed. Don't skip doses. Finish the prescription, even if you begin to feel better. Throw away any leftover antibiotics you have in your house, and be sure you don't share antibiotics with anyone else.

To help prevent the need for antibiotics, here are a few more things you can do: Ask your doctor about immunizations. Handle and store food correctly. And wash your hands often with soap and water for 10 to 30 seconds. Do this before eating or preparing food and after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, handling garbage or uncooked food, blowing your nose, caring for a wound or someone who is sick, or playing with a pet. Ask your doctor or pharmacist any other questions you have about antibiotics and the spread of disease.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or mcglynnrx@tds.net

Thanks,
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