

# Learning About the Safe Use of Antibiotics



## Introduction

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Antibiotics are drugs used to kill bacteria. Bacteria can cause infections. These include strep throat, ear infections, and pneumonia.

These medicines can't cure everything. They don't kill viruses or help with allergies. They don't help illnesses such as the common cold, the flu, or a runny nose. And they can cause side effects.

There are many types of antibiotics. Your doctor will decide which one will work best for your infection. Examples include:

- Amoxicillin.
- Cephalexin (Keflex).
- Ciprofloxacin (Cipro).

## What are the possible side effects?

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Side effects can include:

- Nausea.
- Diarrhea.
- Skin rash.
- Yeast infection.
- A severe allergic reaction. It may cause itching, swelling, and breathing problems. This is rare.

You may have other side effects or reactions not listed here. Check the information that comes with your medicine.

## Should you take antibiotics just in case?

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Don't take antibiotics when you don't need them. If you do that, they may not work when you do need them.

Each time you take antibiotics, you are more likely to have some bacteria that survive and aren't killed by the medicine. Bacteria that don't die can change and become even harder to kill. These are called antibiotic-resistant bacteria. They can cause longer and more serious infections. To treat them, you may need different, stronger antibiotics that have more side effects and may cost more.

So always ask your doctor if antibiotics are the best treatment. Explain that you do not want antibiotics unless you need them.

### Help protect the community

Using antibiotics when they're not needed leads to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. These tougher bacteria can spread to family members, children, and coworkers. People in your community will have a risk of getting an infection that is harder to cure and that costs more to treat.

## How can you take antibiotics safely?

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Be safe with medicine. Take your antibiotics as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of medicine. This will help make sure your infection is cured. It will also help prevent the growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Always take the exact amount that the label says to take. If the label says to take the medicine at a certain time, follow those directions.

You might feel better after you take an antibiotic for a few days. But it is important to keep taking it for as long as prescribed. That will help you get rid of those bacteria that are a bit stronger and that survive the first few days of treatment.

### Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **F695** in the search box to learn more about "**Learning About the Safe Use of Antibiotics**".

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