When you feel sick, you want to feel better fast. But antibiotics aren't the answer for every illness. This brochure can help you know when antibiotics work – and when they won't. For more information, talk to your doctor or visit www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community.

The Risk: Bacteria Becomes Resistant

What's the harm in taking antibiotics anytime? Using antibiotics when they are not needed causes some bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic.

These resistant bacteria are stronger and harder to kill. They can stay in your body and can cause severe illnesses that cannot be cured with antibiotic medicines. A cure for resistant bacteria may require stronger treatment – and possibly a stay in the hospital.

To avoid the threat of antibiotic-resistant infections, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you avoid taking unnecessary antibiotics.

Antibiotics Aren't Always the Answer

Most illnesses are caused by two kinds of germs: bacteria and viruses. Antibiotics can cure bacterial infections – not viral infections.

Bacteria cause strep throat, some pneumonia and sinus infections. *Antibiotics can work.*

Viruses cause the common cold, most coughs and the flu. *Antibiotics don't work.*

Using antibiotics for a virus:

- **Will NOT cure the infection**
- **Will NOT help you feel better**
- **Will NOT keep others from catching your illness**

Protect Yourself With the Best Care

You should not use antibiotics to treat the common cold or the flu.

If antibiotics are prescribed for you to treat a bacterial infection – such as strep throat – be sure to take all of the medicine. Only using part of the prescription means that only part of the infection has been treated. Not finishing the medicine can cause resistant bacteria to develop.

Talk to Your Doctor or Nurse to Learn More

Commonly Asked Questions:

How Do I Know if I Have a Viral Illness or a Bacterial Infection?

Ask your doctor or health care provider and follow his or her advice on what to do about your illness.

Remember, colds are caused by viruses and should not be treated with antibiotics.

Won't an Antibiotic Help Me Feel Better Quicker so That I Can Get Back to Work When I Get a Cold or Flu?

No, antibiotics do nothing to help a viral illness. They will not help you feel better sooner. Ask your doctor or health care provider what other treatments are available to treat your symptoms.

GET SMART...

- Antibiotics are strong medicines, but they don't cure everything.
- When not used correctly, antibiotics can actually be harmful to your health.
- Antibiotics can cure most bacterial infections. Antibiotics cannot cure viral illnesses.
- Antibiotics kill bacteria – not viruses.
- When you are sick, antibiotics are not always the answer.

USE ANTIBIOTICS WISELY

Talk with your doctor or health care provider about the right medicines for your health.

CDC
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For more information, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at:
www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community

GET SMART

Know When Antibiotics Work

Cold or Flu. Antibiotics Don't Work for You.

CDC
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