

## LAURI HICKS

We need antibiotics to combat life-threatening bacterial infections, but overuse of these drugs promotes resistance and reduces their effectiveness.

Antibiotic overuse is a serious problem and a threat to everyone's health. We want Americans to keep their families and communities healthy by getting smart about the proper use of antibiotics. There is a perception that antibiotics are always the answer when we get an infection. Most infections are caused by viruses, which antibiotics don't treat. Prescribing antibiotics for viral infections, like colds, flu, and most sore throats is the most common misuse of these drugs.

As many as 50 percent of people who visit their doctor's office for an infection, like a cold, will walk out with an antibiotic even though it is completely ineffective.

A recent poll conducted by Pew Health Group, in collaboration with CDC, revealed that 36 percent of Americans incorrectly believe that antibiotics are effective treatment for viral infections. Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, like pneumonia and bloodstream infections. It is really important to remember that antibiotics treat bacteria, not viruses.

The biggest problem with using antibiotics when they aren't needed is the development of antibiotic resistance, which is when bacteria survive by out-smarting the antibiotic. Common infections become difficult to treat, and when you really need an antibiotic, it may not work.

There are potential risks when taking any prescription drug. It's important to remember that each time you take an antibiotic you are more likely to carry and spread resistant bacteria. Antibiotic use can also cause complications, ranging from an upset stomach to a serious allergic reaction. More than 142,000 people go to the ER each year due to a bad reaction or a side effect from an antibiotic.

Just because your doctor says you don't need an antibiotic, doesn't mean you're not sick and there aren't other options for treatment. Doctors and patients really need to work together to find the best treatment for an illness. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about symptomatic therapy that may help. And don't forget what your mom told you when you were a kid – get plenty of rest, let your body

do the work, drink lots of fluids, get recommended vaccines, and always, always, wash your hands. You don't want to share those germs with others.

I'm a physician, but I'm also a mom, so I know how difficult it is to see your child suffer with cough and cold symptoms. But antibiotics aren't always the answer. In fact, antibiotic overuse could be harmful. I urge you to work with your child's doctor to find the best treatment for an illness, which may just be helping with symptoms. And doctors should only prescribe antibiotics when they're really needed. We want to keep these miracle drugs working for generations to come.

CDC has two campaigns dedicated to improving antibiotic use called "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work" and "Get Smart for Healthcare," which host an awareness week each November. If you need more information about antibiotic use, please visit [w-w-w-dot-c-d-c-dot-gov-slash-get-smart](http://www.cdc.gov/get-smart).