

Remember:

Antibiotics don't work against colds, flu, sore throats, coughs and infections caused by viruses.

If we want to be able to use antibiotics when we need them, we need to stop overusing them.

Antibiotics prescribing

Antibiotics are a useful tool in fighting serious bacterial infections, but they don't work at all against viruses and can cause side-effects themselves.

A larger problem still is the growing resistance to our antibiotics by bacteria. Overuse and improper use of these drugs are giving bacteria the opportunity to find ways to adapt and become resistant to drugs. Once a bacteria become resistant, there's very little that can be done to treat people with an infection from that bacteria. If we want to be able to use antibiotics when we need them, we need to stop using them when they are not necessary.

Your Infection	Usually lasts	Antibiotics needed
Middle-ear infection	4 days	Sometimes
Sore throat	7 days	Sometimes
Common cold	10 days	No
Flu	10 days	No
Sinusitis	18 days	No
Cough or bronchitis	3 weeks	No

For non-urgent medical advice and support call NHS 111

Available 24/7 and Free to call (even from mobiles)



Antibiotics

What you and your family should know

Useful contacts

You can find out more about a variety of illnesses and conditions, including the main symptoms and when to seek help, on the NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk

If you feel you need medical attention but are not sure, call the 24 hour, 7 day a week helpline NHS 111

If you have any comments about the contents of this leaflet, please contact:

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What we should do

To fight antibiotic resistance, GPs and other medical professionals are prescribing antibiotics only when necessary and for the shortest time possible.

But we can't act alone. If it is felt that you do not need antibiotics, accept that decision and please don't pressure any healthcare professional for antibiotics. If you are prescribed antibiotics, take the course as directed, making sure you finish the course and never share or save your antibiotics.

What to do if a cold goes to your chest

If you are normally well, your immune system will help you recover usually within 10-14 days. However, you need to see a doctor if your cough lasts more than three weeks, you become short of breath or develop chest pains or you already have a serious medical condition.

What to do if your children are always getting infections

Children often get coughs, colds and ear infections, but they usually fight these on their own. A local pharmacist will be able to offer professional advice. Don't expect a prescription for antibiotics as usually children's infections are caused by viruses.

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What can I expect from my doctor?

No prescription

Your doctor may feel that your infection is viral and will clear up on its own. You may be given advice on what else you can do to ease your symptoms. If you feel your symptoms are getting worse, go back and see your doctor.

Delayed prescription

Your doctor may offer you a delayed prescription. This will involve you going back to the surgery in a few days time to collect a prescription if your symptoms are not improving.

Prescription

Your doctor may feel your infection is bacterial and may give you a course of antibiotics. It's important to take all the antibiotics you are given. Don't save some of the medicine for yourself or others as this increases the chance of antibiotic resistance in the future.

What to do if ill

- A pharmacist can advise you on easing your symptoms;
- Don't expect and don't pressure a medical professional to prescribe antibiotics;
- If you are prescribed antibiotics, make sure you use all the medicine given to you and don't save any for another time;
- Wash your hand regularly with soap and water to help stop the spread of infection.

Did you know?

- Our body fights most infections without the need for drugs.
- Overuse of antibiotics is the main reason bacteria are becoming resistant to drugs.
- There's a risk that antibiotics will stop working if we continue to overuse drugs.

What are viral infections?

- These are infections caused by viruses rather than bacteria.
- Viruses are very small and attack living cells in order to reproduce.
- All common colds and flu are caused by viruses as are many cases of diarrhoea and nose, sinus, ear and throat infections.

What are antibiotics?

- Antibiotics are medicines that help fight serious infections caused by bacteria, but don't work against viral infections.
- Antibiotics should only be used when necessary. They can cause side effects such as diarrhoea, vomiting, rashes and allergic reactions and can also interfere with other medicines like the contraceptive pill and warfarin.
- GPs are being asked to prescribe antibiotics only when necessary.