Don’t Take Antibiotics for Granted

It’s easy to see why antibiotics are helpful, and now you know why sometimes you or your family member may not need them. We can all help by taking antibiotics only when they’re really needed.

Infection Management and Antibiotic Stewardship

This brochure is part of a larger effort to improve “antibiotic stewardship” in nursing homes. Antibiotic stewardship means using antibiotics to treat suspected infections only when they’re necessary and appropriate. Achieving best practice in infection management and antibiotic use is a team effort; it involves everyone who participates in making decisions about care, including doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, residents, and family members.

Why Not Antibiotics?

Taking antibiotics when they are not needed is like leaving the lights on all the time…

The lights may burn out, leaving us in the dark when we need them most.

If we use antibiotics when we don’t need them, they may not work when we get sick.

Resources For You

CDC: www.cdc.gov/getssmart/
FDA: www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM078484

For More Information

Program on Aging, Disability, and Long-Term Care
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
nursinghomeinfections.unc.edu; (919) 966-7173
Antibiotics: Powerful Drugs, But Only When Used For the Right Reasons

Antibiotic drugs are strong medicine that can save lives when used appropriately to treat bacterial infections. Overuse of antibiotics can cause problems for individuals and for the health of the community. It’s important for all of us that these powerful drugs are used only when they can help, so they’ll work when we really need them.

Overusing Antibiotics Can Cause Problems

How can antibiotics hurt you or someone you care about?

Antibiotics can, in some cases:

- Cause nausea and vomiting
- Cause diarrhea, including the kind due to *C. difficile*, an infection that can lead to severe symptoms
- Cause a rash or other allergic reactions
- Harm your kidneys or other organs
- Create bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics

What is “antibiotic resistance”?

Antibiotics are developed to kill germs, but the germs fight back by trying to make themselves immune to the antibiotics. When a germ wins, the antibiotic no longer kills it – that germ has become “resistant” to the antibiotic. The more antibiotics people take, the more chances the germs have to become resistant. That’s why it’s best to use an antibiotic only when it’s absolutely necessary.

When are antibiotics not needed?

Antibiotics can help the body fight bacterial infections, but they’re not miracle drugs for everything.

Antibiotics aren’t helpful when:

- You have an infection that is caused by a virus (like a cold or the flu).
- You don’t have an infection but instead have some other medical problem (such as anemia).
- Bacteria are found in a urine culture from a sample you gave, but you don’t have symptoms of infection. It’s normal for many people to have bacteria in their urine without having an infection.

What should you do?

- Talk with your doctor, nurse practitioner (NP) or physician assistant (PA) about the benefits and harms of antibiotics.
- Work with your medical provider to avoid unnecessary medications for yourself and your family.
- Take antibiotics as prescribed for as long as they’re prescribed.

What shouldn’t you do?

- Don’t request an antibiotic when your doctor or other medical provider says it isn’t needed.
- Don’t ask for an antibiotic if you don’t have symptoms of an infection.
- Don’t take an antibiotic for a virus (a cold or the flu).