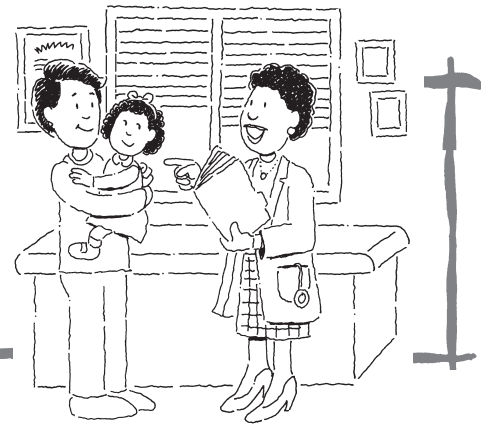


Antibiotics and Your Child



Antibiotics are medicines used to treat specific bacterial infections (such as ear infections and strep throat). Infections caused by certain viruses (such as influenza [flu] and herpes simplex) are treated with medicines called **antivirals**. Infections caused by fungi (such as athlete's foot and yeast infections) are treated with medicines called **antifungals**.

It is important to understand that different types of infections can only be treated if the right medicine is used. For instance, antibiotics are only useful to treat bacterial infections and will not provide any benefit for viral infections. Also, many viral infections are mild and will get better without using medicines. Using unnecessary medicines doesn't help and may actually cause harm.

Before an antibiotic is prescribed, your child's doctor will need to find out if your child's infection is caused by bacteria and can be treated with an antibiotic. If an antibiotic is prescribed, it's important that your child takes it for as long as recommended, even if your child feels better. If your child stops taking the antibiotic too soon, the infection may not be treated completely and the symptoms may start again.

The following are answers to common questions about the use of antibiotics. Talk with your child's doctor if you have other questions or concerns.

Q: My child has a really bad cold. Why won't the doctor prescribe an antibiotic?

A: Colds are caused by viruses. There are no antibiotics to cure infections caused by viruses. Influenza is a viral infection that can cause cold symptoms for which an antiviral medicine will work. For most other colds, there are no antivirals that work nor are they recommended. Your child's doctor will let you know if an antiviral is needed for your child.

Q: What if my child has a middle ear infection and is in pain?

A: Because pain is often the first and most uncomfortable symptom of ear infection, it's important to help comfort your child by giving her pain medicine. In most cases, your child will feel better after the first 1 to 2 days. Acetaminophen and ibuprofen are over-the-counter pain medicines that may help lessen much of the pain. Be sure to use the right dose for your child's age and size. There are also eardrops that may help ear pain for a short time. Ask your child's doctor whether these drops should be used. Over-the-counter cold medicines (decongestants and antihistamines) don't help clear up ear infections.

Note: Antibiotics may not always be needed to help your child's middle ear infection. One reason is that viruses can cause some middle ear infections. Also, some bacterial ear infections will get better without medicine in 2 to 3 days. Some children with a low fever and mild symptoms of a bacterial middle ear infection may safely be observed without antibiotics.

Q: If some viral infections sometimes lead to bacterial infections, why doesn't my child's doctor prescribe antibiotics?

A: In most cases bacterial infections do not follow viral infections.

Treating viral infections with antibiotics may occasionally lead to an infection caused by resistant bacteria instead of stopping an infection. Let your child's doctor know if the illness gets worse or lasts a long time so that the right treatment can be given as needed.

Q: Doesn't yellow or green mucus mean that my child has a bacterial infection?

A: No. During a typical viral cold it's normal for the mucus to change from clear to yellow or green. Mucus gets thick and changes color during a viral cold as part of the normal healing process. If the yellow/green mucus persists more than 8 to 9 days, an antibiotic may be needed to treat sinusitis, a not so common complication of a cold.

Q: What are the common side effects of antibiotics?

A: Side effects may include rashes, allergic reactions, nausea, diarrhea, and stomach pain. Some people may have an allergic reaction that causes a rash, itching, or hives. In severe cases, some people may have trouble breathing. Always let your child's doctor know if your child has any side effects.

Q: When are antibiotics harmful?

A: When antibiotics aren't used the right way, they may do more harm than good. For instance, with repeated use and misuse of antibiotics, bacteria can build up tolerance or resistance to that antibiotic and may make it harder to treat your child the next time.

Q: What are resistant bacteria?

A: Resistant bacteria are bacteria that are no longer killed by certain antibiotics. These resistant bacteria can also be spread to other children and adults.

Q: Can resistant bacteria be treated?

A: Some resistant bacteria can still be treated with different medicines (antibiotics of a different type). These medicines may need to be given by vein (IV) in the hospital.

Using antibiotics safely

Keep the following in mind if your child gets sick:

- **Antibiotics aren't always the answer when your child is sick.** Ask your child's doctor what the best treatment is for your child.
- **Antibiotics work against bacterial infections.** They don't work on colds and flu.
- **Finish all prescribed doses of an antibiotic.** If your child feels better and stops the medicine too soon, the infection could return.
- **Don't use one child's antibiotic for a sibling or friend;** you may give the wrong medicine and cause harm.
- **Throw away unused antibiotics.** Do not save antibiotics for later use; some out-of-date medicines can actually be harmful. Call Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222 or check the US Food and Drug Administration Web site at www.fda.gov for information on the safe disposal of medicines.

Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

