

Antibiotic Fact Sheet for Patients

Antibiotics do cure many illnesses, but not all. The invention of antibiotics has dramatically improved healthcare and allowed people to survive many illnesses that were once deadly such as tuberculosis. Unfortunately, antibiotics are limited in their ability to kill all germs.

Bacteria vs. Viruses

Germs come in two main forms, bacteria and viruses. Viruses cause the majority of coughs, colds, sore throats, influenza, and everyday illnesses. Unfortunately, antibiotics have *no effect on viruses*. Antibiotics *only* help in *bacterial* infections.

Bacteria fighting back

The incorrect use of antibiotics has helped bacteria to become stronger than many of our antibiotics. When taking an antibiotic, the first few pills kill the weakest bacteria first leaving the stronger ones alive and well. These strong bacteria are only killed if the last few pills are taken. When the last few pills are not taken, the stronger bacteria can learn to resist the antibiotics and multiply. These resistant bacteria are now spreading in our community and are much harder to kill. These resistant infections may require a more powerful antibiotic or multiple antibiotics at one time. Sometimes even this may not work.

How can you help?

Bacteria only get stronger with your help so let's do our part to stop them.

- ❖ Always finish all your antibiotics and never try to save antibiotics for the “next illness”.
- ❖ Don't take antibiotics unless prescribed by a doctor even if a family member offers you some.
- ❖ Understand when talking with your doctor that not all illnesses are helped by antibiotics. Sometimes time and rest are the best cure.



Infectious Disease Epidemiology

Adapted from Texas Department of State Health Services,
Louisiana Office of Public Health, and the CDC