

Antibiotic Awareness

FACTS FOR CONSUMERS



What's All the Buzz about Antibiotics?

Antibiotics have saved lives but now we are using them when we don't need them. If we keep using them for the wrong reasons (such as coughs and sore throats) eventually they won't work anymore or when we really need them.

Antibiotic stewardship is an effort for every community to work together to reduce antibiotic resistance, which is a serious national and global health problem. Although antibiotics save lives, they are often improperly used in both humans and animals, causing bacteria to change in a way that they become "superbugs" and resistant to antibiotics. For persons that get sick with a "superbug," there are limited antibiotics and in some instances no antibiotics that will work.



What Can Everyone Do to Help?

Try to avoid infections in the first place. If you do get an infection, use antibiotics correctly.

DO:

- Wash hands often with plain soap and water (antibacterial soap is not necessary)
- Make sure medical staff have washed hands well before any procedure
- Stay up-to-date with vaccines
- Talk to your doctor to make sure you only use antibiotics for the right reasons and for the right amount of time
- Take antibiotics as prescribed
- Choose antibiotic-free meats when possible
- Rest and get plenty of fluids when you have a common cold or sore throat



(Source: Centers for Disease Control, September 2017)

DO NOT:

- Expect an antibiotic for a common cold, flu or acute bronchitis
- Give your antibiotics to someone else, or take antibiotics that were not ordered for you
- Save unused antibiotics to take later



5 Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Make sure you're taking antibiotics for the right reasons by asking these five questions:

1. Do I really need antibiotics?
 - Antibiotics fight bacterial infections, like strep throat but they don't fight viruses like common colds, flu, or most sore throats and sinus infections.
2. What are the risks?
 - Antibiotics have side effects such as vomiting, diarrhea, and allergic reactions. They can also lead to "antibiotic resistance."
3. Are there simpler, safer options?
 - You may just need to rest and drink plenty of fluids.
4. How much do they cost?
 - Antibiotics may cost you a lot of time and money if you are not on the correct one or if you have side effects from them.
5. How do I safely take antibiotics?
 - If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, take them exactly as directed.



Resources to Learn More

Be Antibiotics Aware is a national effort led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help fight antibiotic resistance and improve antibiotic prescribing and use. Visit their website for more information: www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use.

Choosing Wisely is a program to help doctors and patients discuss the best options for their care. They have developed resources to help patients understand when antibiotic use may or may not be needed. Visit their website for more information: www.choosingwisely.org/patient-resources.

Great Plains Quality Innovation Network (QIN) serves the states of Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota working to make healthcare in the region better. Visit our website: www.greatplainsqin.org/consumers.