

**ANTIBIOTICS  
CAN SAVE  
LIVES, BUT  
THEY'RE NOT  
ALWAYS THE  
ANSWER  
WHEN  
YOU'RE SICK.**

**When antibiotics  
aren't needed,  
they won't help  
you and the side  
effects could still  
cause harm.**

**IF YOU HAVE  
AN INFECTION  
CAUSED BY  
A VIRUS,  
ANTIBIOTICS  
WON'T MAKE  
YOU FEEL  
BETTER.**

Lela had a cold two weeks ago. Lela's grandmother did the right thing by making sure she received plenty of rest and fluids. She also kept a close eye on her granddaughter, knowing that if Lela got worse, she would need to see a doctor right away. Lela's grandmother knew that giving Lela antibiotics for her cold would not help her feel better, because antibiotics don't treat infections caused by viruses, like colds and flu.



To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit [www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use](http://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

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**BE  
ANTIBIOTICS  
AWARE**

Smart Use, Best Care



**BE  
ANTIBIOTICS  
AWARE**

SMART USE, BEST CARE

**Antibiotics do not work on infections caused by viruses,** like colds, flu, bronchitis and runny noses (even if the mucus is thick, yellow or green).

**An antibiotic will not make you feel better if you have a viral infection.** Respiratory viruses usually go away in a week or two without treatment. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the best way to feel better while your body fights off the virus.



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### What happens if I take antibiotics when I don't need them?

Anytime antibiotics are used, they can cause side effects. Common side effects of antibiotics can include rash, dizziness, nausea, diarrhea, and yeast infections. More serious side effects include *Clostridioides difficile* infection (also called *C. difficile* or *C. diff*), which causes diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and death. People can also have severe and life-threatening allergic reactions. These side effects can happen anytime you take antibiotics, even when you don't need them. Your doctor will help you understand if the benefits outweigh the risks of side effects.

Taking antibiotics also creates resistant bacteria. Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria no longer respond to the drugs designed to kill them.

### Can antibiotic resistance affect me?

Yes, it can. Antibiotic resistance is one of the most urgent threats to the public's health. More than 2.8 million antibiotic-resistant infections occur in the United States each year, and more than 35,000 people die as a result.

### How can I stay healthy and keep others healthy?

- Clean your hands.
- Cover your coughs.
- Stay home when you're sick.
- Get recommended vaccines, such as the flu vaccine.

### Why is it important for everyone to help improve antibiotic prescribing and use?

Antibiotics save lives, and they are critical tools for treating life-threatening conditions such as pneumonia and sepsis. Helping healthcare professionals improve the way they prescribe antibiotics, and improving the way we take antibiotics, helps keep us healthy now, helps fight antibiotic resistance, and ensures that life-saving antibiotics will be available for future generations.

### What if I am prescribed antibiotics?

If you need antibiotics, take them exactly as prescribed. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about your antibiotics, or if you develop any side effects, especially diarrhea, since that could be *C. difficile* infection, which needs to be treated. In some cases, your doctor may give you a prescription for antibiotics, but tell you to wait and see if you feel better in a few days before filling it. If you feel better, you do not need to fill the antibiotic prescription, and do not have to risk the side effects.

### What should I do when I have a cold?

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the best way to feel better while your body fights off a virus.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer or saline spray if your breathing is congested.
- Get plenty of rest.
- If you have an infection that's not getting better, or is getting worse, get medical care immediately.