For Consumers
A Quick Reference Sheet from the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics

What is Antibiotic Resistance?
Antibiotics are a medical treasure because they have the ability to cure infections caused by bacteria. However, the effectiveness of antibiotics is being threatened by overuse and improper use for viral (non-bacterial) infections, such as the common cold and flu, which cannot be cured by antibiotics. This misuse inevitably leads to bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotics used to treat infections. Antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections are not only costly, difficult to treat, and potentially deadly, but they can also spread rapidly, affecting society as a whole.

Antibiotics should not be used for infections caused by viruses, such as the common cold and flu.

What Can I Do to Help?

- Enjoy a healthy, balanced, and smoke-free lifestyle with plenty of rest, exercise and good nutrition.
- Do not share any of your antibiotics or save them for later use. A course of antibiotics can range from 3 to 14 days and longer for some infections.
- If your health care provider prescribes an antibiotic, take it exactly as written on the label.
- Never take antibiotics for viral infections, such as colds or flu.
- Do not insist on an antibiotic if your health care provider does not think you need one.
- WASH YOUR HANDS often with regular soap and water.
- Take ALL of your prescription, even if you are feeling better. If you stop your antibiotic early, the bacteria that have not been killed can restart or spread the infection.
- Check with your pediatrician to make sure all of your children’s immunizations are up to date.

Listen to Your Health Care Provider
If you take antibiotics incorrectly or when you do not need them, they lose their strength and their ability to kill the bacteria causing your infection. The bacteria will become resistant to the antibiotic, and the next time you need antibiotics, they may not work. Your health care provider knows what types of infections can be cured by antibiotics and how long you must take those antibiotics to be fully cured. Always take your antibiotics exactly as they are prescribed.
**Cold symptoms, such as sore throat, runny nose, post-nasal drip, cough, fever, laryngitis, sinus congestion, discolored nasal discharge and headache**

**Flu symptoms, such as those similar to symptoms for colds, PLUS aches, pains, chills, fever up to 103 degrees and sensitivity to light**

1. If you have a respiratory illness of unusual severity or duration, your infection may be caused by bacteria. In these cases, your physician may decide to treat you with an antibiotic.
2. Contact your health care practitioner if you have a prolonged cough.
3. There are several types of ear infections. Antibiotics are effective for most, but not all, ear infections.
4. Even if you have a runny nose or yellow or green mucous coming from your nose, you may not need an antibiotic. Antibiotics should only be used for infections caused by bacteria.
5. Most sore throats, particularly those associated with a runny nose and cough, are caused by viruses and cannot be cured by antibiotics.
6. Strep throat is caused by bacteria and requires treatment with antibiotics. Your physician can do a throat swab to determine whether you have strep throat and need an antibiotic.

The best way to know when to take an antibiotic is by talking to your health care practitioner. Remember that viruses cause most of the common cold and flu-like symptoms. **Only bacterial infections respond to antibiotics.**

### When Do I Need an Antibiotic?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness/Symptom</th>
<th>Usual Cause</th>
<th>Antibiotic Needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virus</td>
<td>Bacteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colds*</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough and Bronchitis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear Pain</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flu**</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runny Nose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinus Infection</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore Throat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strep Throat</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary Tract Infection</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Established in 1981, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) is an international non-governmental organization fighting to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics and other antimicrobials.