

What is “Antibiotic Resistance”?

Antibiotics normally work by killing germs called bacteria. Sometimes not all of the germs are killed. The strongest ones are left to grow and spread. A person can get sick again, and this time the germs are harder to kill because the antibiotics no longer work. This is called resistance and makes some infections very hard to control. Resistance can make you sick longer, and need more doctor visits and drugs that are even stronger. The more often you use an antibiotic, the greater the chance that the germs will become resistant.

Don't Take Antibiotics for Granted

It's easy to see why antibiotics are helpful, and now you know why sometimes you or a family member may not need them. You can help yourself and others by taking antibiotics only when they are needed.

Resources for you:

CDC: www.cdc.gov/getsmart/

FDA: <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM078484>

Adapted for the

Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership



The Collaborative Studies of Long-Term



When Do You Need An Antibiotic?

Taking antibiotics when you don't need them is like leaving the lights on all the time.

- **The lights may burn out, leaving you in the dark when you most need them.**
- **If you use antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you get sick.**

Read more inside...



Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership

This facility is working with a group of local and national experts to prevent infections. They are working together to make sure antibiotics are being used the right way.

This brochure is part of an effort to help doctors, nursing staff, residents, and families know when and how to use antibiotics. The Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership is trying to reach everyone who is involved in care decisions. It is also informing all of these people about ways to care for infections that do not always need an antibiotic.

How can antibiotics hurt you?

Antibiotic drugs can save lives, but using antibiotics can cause problems, too. Older people have more side effects from medicines, which can cause problems all over the body. As you can see below, they can really cause trouble!

Antibiotics can:

- cause nausea and upset your stomach
- cause diarrhea, including with infection caused by *C. difficile*
- cause rash or other allergic reactions
- affect your kidneys
- create bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics

When aren't antibiotics needed?

Antibiotics can help the body fight bacterial infections, but they are not miracle drugs for everything.

They are NOT helpful when:

- You have an infection that is caused by a virus (such as a cold, bronchitis, the flu, or most types of diarrhea)
- You don't have an infection but instead have some other medical problem (such as anemia)
- You are not actually sick (except in a few situations where antibiotics have been shown to prevent infection)
- You have decided against them (such as near the end of life)

Why would a doctor give antibiotics when they aren't needed?

- Doctors aren't always sure what is causing an illness. They may worry they have to provide treatment right away.
- Some patients and families think they aren't getting good care if they don't get an antibiotic and so insist to their doctor that they want one.

What should you do?

- Talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner (NP) about the benefits and harms of antibiotics.
- Take medicine exactly the way the doctor/NP says. Don't skip doses.
- Take care of yourself: get rest, eat and drink enough, and take over-the-counter medicines as needed.
- When you are on hospice or thinking about hospice, talk with your doctor about whether you need antibiotics anymore.

What shouldn't you do?

- Don't demand an antibiotic when the doctor or NP says it isn't needed.
- Don't take an antibiotic for a virus (cold, cough, or flu).