

## 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.

## Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership

This facility is working together with local and national experts to prevent infections and promote appropriate antibiotic use.

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.

Additional copies available at <http://macoalition.org/evaluation-and-treatment-uti-in-elderly.shtml>

*\*This brochure is adapted from work by the Collaborative Studies of Long Term Care at the University of North Carolina for Massachusetts long term care facilities*

### Resources For You

CDC: [www.cdc.gov/getsmart/](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/)

FDA: [www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM078484](http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/UCM078484)

*Adapted by the  
Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership\**



Massachusetts Coalition  
for the  
Prevention of Medical Errors



## 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...*

## Antibiotics: Powerful Drugs, But Only When Used For The Right Reasons.

Antibiotic drugs are strong medicine that can save lives when used appropriately to treat bacterial infections. Overuse of antibiotics can cause problems for individuals and for the health of the community. It is important for us all that these powerful drugs are used only when they can help, so they will work when we really need them.

### Overusing Antibiotics Can Cause Problems. 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.

#### Antibiotics can, in some cases:

- › Cause nausea and vomiting.
- › Cause diarrhea, including the kind due to *C. difficile*, an infection that can lead to severe symptoms
- › Cause rash or other allergic reactions.
- › Harm your kidneys or other organs.
- › Create bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics.

### 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 health care provider visits and drugs that are even stronger. The more often you use an antibiotic, the greater the chance that the germs will become resistant.

### 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 (like a cold or the flu).
- › You don't have an infection but instead have some other medical problem (such as anemia).
- › Bacteria are found in a urine culture from a specimen you gave, but you do not have symptoms of infection.

It is normal for many older people without symptoms of a urinary tract infection to have bacteria in their urine, especially in long term care.

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

- › Doctors are not 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, nurse practitioner (NP), or physician assistant (PA) about the benefits and harms of antibiotics.
- › Take medicine exactly the way it's prescribed.
- › Take care of yourself: Get rest, eat and drink enough.
- › When you are on hospice or thinking about hospice, talk with your health care provider about whether you need antibiotics anymore.

### What shouldn't you do?

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