

Why Didn't I Get Antibiotics Today?



Your doctor would like to avoid using antibiotics unless they are absolutely necessary for treating your condition. When antibiotics are overused, bacteria can become resistant to treatment, making it much harder to treat serious infections in the future. It is important to understand when it is necessary to use antibiotics and also when it is not. To help you with this, here are some common questions and answers.

When do I NEED antibiotics?

Most illnesses are caused by two kinds of germs: bacteria and viruses. Antibiotics are needed to treat illnesses caused by bacteria, such as streptococcus (“strep” throat) and some types of pneumonia.

When do I NOT need antibiotics?

Antibiotics should never be used to treat illnesses caused by viruses such as colds, flu, sore throats (except for those resulting from strep throat), and most cases involving simple cough or bronchitis. Even high fevers, which are part of the body’s natural defense against infection, can be caused by viruses which CANNOT be treated by antibiotics.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell if your illness is caused by a virus or bacteria. Your doctor may choose to wait a day or two before deciding whether or not you actually need an antibiotic. Taking antibiotics “just to be on the safe side” is not recommended; it is more likely to encourage the development of resistance to antibiotics (see below) and is much riskier than waiting until your doctor is more certain that they are needed.

Remember that using antibiotics to treat a virus will NOT cure the illness, will NOT help you feel better and will NOT protect other people from catching your illness.

What is the harm in taking antibiotics if I don't need them?

Using antibiotics when they are not needed causes resistant bacteria that are stronger and harder to treat and can stay in your body causing other serious illnesses. Curing these resistant bacteria may require stronger medications and sometimes a stay in hospital.

**When your doctor does not offer antibiotics, it is in your best interest.
If antibiotics are used when they are not necessary, they might not work when
you really need them.**