

Antibiotics

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What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicine that attack some bacteria and help to avoid and heal the infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics kill bacteria and prevent them from breeding.

Their correct use can save lives. However, antibiotics cannot be helpful if they are not used in the appropriate manner.

Are antibiotics effective against every kind of infections?

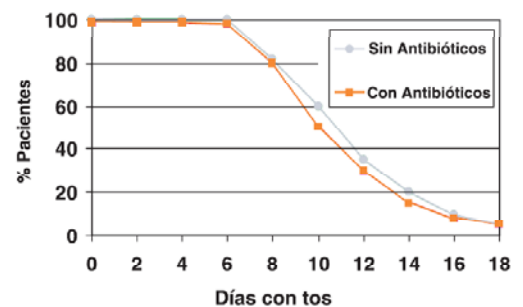


Both bacteria and virus can cause infections. Nevertheless, antibiotics are just effective against infections caused by some bacteria. Antibiotics do not battle infections caused by virus as: cold, flu, cough, bronchitis and sore throat.

If a virus causes an illness, using antibiotics can be more harmful than helpful. Every time someone uses antibiotics, there are more possibilities that bacteria in their body become immune to them. Thus, in the future, your son (or you) could be infected or spread an infection that those antibiotics cannot heal.

What can I do if the infection is provoked by virus?

You should not expect antibiotics to heal these illnesses. The best you can usually do is to leave colds and flu stay and only use medicine to relieve their symptoms (for instance, high fever). A cold can last two weeks and that does not mean that there is something wrong. A pediatrician or a nurse can give you some advice on what to do to relieve the symptoms while your body uses its natural defenses against the virus.



When are antibiotics needed?

The answer to this question depends on the cause of the infection. Your pediatrician will tell you if you should use antibiotics. This chart can be helpful:

If the illness is	caused by		Do I need an antibiotic?	Comments
	Virus	Bacteria		
Cold	✓		No	Viruses often cause these infections. They must not be treated with antibiotics
Bronchitis, cough	✓		No	
Flu	✓		No	
Diarrhea	✓		No	
Nasal mucosity (any colour)	✓		No	
Sore throat with or without fever	✓	✓	Not generally	Your pediatrician will tell you if antibiotics are needed.
Ear infection	✓	✓	Sometimes	

Can I stop having an antibiotic if I feel better?

If a pediatrician prescribes an antibiotic for your child, make sure that he/she has it for the advised period, even if he feels better after 2 or 3 days. Follow strictly what was prescribed: amount to have, daily frequency and number of days. This makes lower the possibility that some bacteria remain in your body since could become immune to antibiotics.

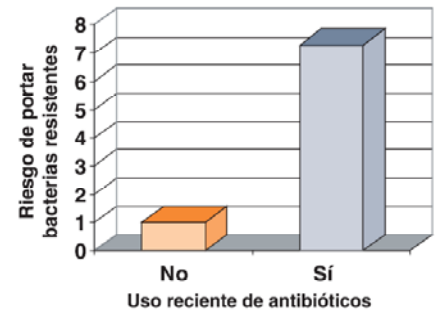
What else can I do to avoid infections?

You can avoid becoming infected if you have good hygiene habits. **Wash your hands with water and soap**, specially **before** having a meal or feeding a unweaned baby, and **after** going to the bathroom and helping your child when he/she goes to the bathroom and after touching a pet. It is advisable to teach your children these habits.

What can happen if I use antibiotics without medical prescription?

Bacteria can become immune to antibiotics if you have them when you do not need them. This is already happening nowadays. We must think that if our child has immune bacteria, his/her possibilities to heal are lower. Furthermore, there is a higher risk for difficulties to take place. This can become a very serious problem for some people.

What can we do to avoid immunity to antibiotics? Use antibiotics sensibly.



Remember. IMPORTANT!

- Antibiotics should not be used with all kind of infections; most child infections are healed without them. You should not ask a pediatrician to prescribe antibiotics if you do not need them. [Antibiotics kill bacteria, not virus so they are not always the solution]
- Do not use antibiotics without a medical prescription. [An unneeded antibiotic can be harmful for your child]
- When your pediatrician prescribes an antibiotic, follow strictly its instructions (dose, time of the dose, treatment duration) and if you have a question do not hesitate to ask him/her.
- Do not share medicine with other people, do not keep remaining medicine to use it next time (you can leave these remaining medicines in the chemist's)
- Washing your hands is the best way to avoid spreading infections.

Where can you find more information (in Spanish) on the Internet

- Medline Plus (Nacional Medicine Library of the USA): <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/spanish/antibiotics.html>
- Campaign to promote the correct use of antibiotics (Units of control and prevention of illnesses, USA): <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/community/antibioticos.htm>
- A guide for parents to use antibiotics correctly: http://www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/multilingual/spanish_parent.pdf
- Famiped (Families, pediatricians and teenagers online): <http://www.aepap.org/familia/famiped/index.htm>