

# ANTIBIOTIC AWARENESS

**When you're unwell, you might assume an antibiotic will make you better. However, this isn't always the case. Here's a quick look at this medication, including its uses and cautions.**

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**What is an antibiotic?** Antibiotics are a medicine made from an antimicrobial agent via a mold or bacterium that kills or slows growth of other bacteria. Common antibiotics include penicillin and streptomycin.

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**When is an antibiotic prescribed?** Antibiotics treat certain infections caused by bacteria. These include strep throat, whooping cough and urinary tract infections, as well as *some instances* of sinus and middle ear infections.

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**What *can't* antibiotics treat?** Antibiotics aren't useful against viruses such as the flu or a cold. Taking an antibiotic when you have a virus can contribute to antibiotic resistance.

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**What is antibiotic resistance?** This resistance occurs when bacteria develop the ability to defeat the drugs designed to kill them. Each time you take antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones stay behind. Resistance traits can be inherited generation to generation. Overuse of antibiotics leads to an increase in drug-resistant bacteria, such as "MRSA" (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). Overusing and overprescribing of antibiotics threatens the usefulness of antibiotics.

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**Should I still take antibiotics?** Yes, but only when and as they are prescribed. Feeling better and still have pills left? Go ahead and finish them. The whole course is needed for the treatment. Discover an unfinished round of antibiotics months later or that were prescribed to someone else? Don't take them. They likely won't help, and it would increase the risk of antibiotic resistance. The resistant bacteria that develop can be transmitted to other people, so you're not just putting yourself at risk.

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**Each year in the US, more than 2.8 million infections occur from antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and more than 35,000 people die as a result.**