



ADVICE AND FACTS ABOUT ANTIBIOTICS AND INFECTIONS

Have you just caught a cold?

Tips and advice on dealing with a runny nose, cough and sore throat

If you're like most people, you will have hundreds of colds during the course of your lifetime. The common cold may not be harmful, but it can be troublesome. This sheet answers eight frequently asked questions about colds.

What is a cold?

The common cold is the most common type of infection among humans and is caused by viruses. Typical symptoms are a runny nose, cough, sore throat and fever. A cold usually lasts for 7 to 10 days, although some symptoms such as a cough can stay for several weeks.

How often do people catch colds?

Children get more colds than adults, often 6 to 10 colds a year. Adults typically have 2 to 3 colds a year – more if they have a lot of contact with children.

Is there a cure for the common cold?

There is no medicine that can cure a cold. However, medicines can sometimes ease its symptoms. If you have a runny nose and nasal congestion, a decongestant nasal spray might make you feel better. You can try cough medicine, but you may find that it has little effect. Take a pain reliever or a fever reducing medication, if needed.

Why don't antibiotics fight colds?

Taking penicillin or another antibiotic won't help if you have a cold. Antibiotics only fight bacteria and have no effect on common cold viruses. The body is capable of curing colds, bronchitis and many other respiratory infections on its own.

Is it harmful to take antibiotics?

Taking antibiotics when they aren't needed is a bad idea, since they also affect the "good" bacteria in your body, giving more room for potentially "bad" bacteria. Antibiotics can also have side effects, such as diarrhoea and skin rash. The use of antibiotics can also lead to bacterial resistance, meaning that the bacteria learn how to survive antibiotics.

When do I need to take antibiotics?

The immune system is effective in fighting many common bacterial infections, such as ear infections, sinus infections (sinusitis) and tonsillitis. For most of these infections, antibiotics only speed up the healing process a little bit or not at all. In the case of pneumonia, on the other hand, antibiotics make a big difference and can even save lives.

When should I see a doctor?

RUNNY NOSE: Adults who get a sinus infection (sinusitis) usually experience thick nasal discharge that lasts for more than 10 days, along with pain in the cheeks and teeth. Antibiotics can be helpful at this point. Children can have lasting, thick nasal discharge for a long time without having a sinus infection.

COUGH: If your cough is accompanied by a high fever, significant malaise (discomfort), difficulty breathing, rapid breathing or pain when you inhale, you may have pneumonia. Pneumonia is almost always treated with antibiotics, since the infection can become serious.

SORE THROAT: If you are experiencing pain when swallowing, without the additional symptoms of a cough or a runny nose, you should see a doctor. If you are otherwise healthy and are able to eat and drink without great difficulty, you can delay seeing a doctor for a couple of days.

EARACHE: If your child has an earache that doesn't go away, see your doctor within 24 hours. For an earache that starts in the evening, the best solution is often to give your child a pain reliever and go to the doctor the next day if your child isn't feeling better. Children younger than 1 year or older than 12 years may need penicillin if they develop an ear infection. For children aged 1 to 12 years, you can, in consultation with your doctor, wait before giving penicillin, because the infection almost always heals on its own.

FEVER: As an adult, see a doctor if you have a high fever accompanied by significant malaise (discomfort) for more than 4 to 5 days in connection with a cold. When it comes to an infant or a young child, do not wait as long to seek care.

If you are worried about the infection: Go to the doctor and ask for a medical assessment: Can antibiotics help me? If so, are the benefits greater than the risks?

How can I avoid catching a cold?

You can lower the risk of catching a cold or passing it on to other people if you wash your hands often during the common cold season. If you have a cold, avoid shaking people's hands when greeting them. Sneeze and cough into your elbow and use disposable tissues.

ANTIBIOTICS

are our most important weapon for fighting serious bacterial infections that could otherwise be deadly. Antibiotics are also a prerequisite for other medical procedures, such as major surgery and cancer therapy.

The more antibiotics we use, the greater the risk that bacteria will develop resistance to them. Southern Europe uses antibiotics more heavily than northern Europe and has a much greater problem with bacterial resistance to antibiotics.



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