

## Antibiotics are Powerful Medications That Should Only Be Used For The Right Reasons.

Antibiotics are medications 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 all of us 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?

Antibiotics can help the body fight bacterial infections. But we know all medications have side effects. Older people have more side effects from all types of medications, which can cause problems all over the body.

### Antibiotics can:

- Cause nausea and vomiting
- Cause diarrhea, including the kind due to *Clostridium difficile* that can lead to severe symptoms
- Cause rashes or other allergic reactions
- Harm your kidneys
- Create bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics

## What is “Antibiotic Resistance”?

Antibiotics usually work by killing germs called bacteria. Sometimes not all of the germs are killed. The strongest or surviving germs are left to grow and spread. A person may get sick again, and this time the germs are harder to kill because the antibiotics no longer work on these stronger germs. This is called resistance and makes some infections harder to control.

Infections caused by resistant bacteria can make you sick longer, and require more doctor 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 are antibiotics not needed?

- When you have an infection that is caused by a virus (like a cold or the flu) and not bacteria.
- When bacteria are found in a urine culture from a specimen you gave, but you do not have any symptoms of infection. It is normal for many older people to have bacteria in their urine, without having symptoms of a bladder or urinary tract infection, especially in Continuing 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 or residents and their families think they aren't getting good care if they don't get an antibiotic and may insist to their doctor that they want one.

## What should you do?

- Talk with your doctor or nurse practitioner about the benefits and harms of antibiotics.
- Take medicine exactly the way it is prescribed.
- Take care of yourself: get rest, eat and drink enough.

## What shouldn't you do?

- Do not request an antibiotic when the doctor or nurse practitioner says it is not needed.
- Do not take an antibiotic for a virus (cold or flu).

## 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.

All healthcare facilities in Saskatchewan are working together with local and provincial experts to follow practices that are recommended to prevent infections.

We are also starting to promote appropriate antibiotic use with the support of national and international groups and resources.

This brochure is part of an effort to help doctors, nursing staff, residents and families know when and how to use antibiotics. It is important to reach out to everyone involved in making care decisions and inform them about ways to provide supportive care that do not always require antibiotics.

### Resources For You

**CDC:** <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/fast-facts.html>

**European Fact sheet:** [http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/eaad/Documents/EAAD\\_HP\\_factsheet.pdf](http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/eaad/Documents/EAAD_HP_factsheet.pdf)

**Health Canada:** <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/antibio-eng.php>

**Government of Ontario:** [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh\\_antibio.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/cmoh_antibio.pdf)

**Minnesota Antibiotic Resistance Collaborative:** <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/med/antibio-eng.php>

**Michigan Resistance Reduction Coalition:** <http://mi-marr.org/faq.php>

Adapted from the Massachusetts Infection Prevention Partnership

## 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.



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