Safe Antibiotic Use

Antibiotics should only be used to treat bacterial infections. But how do you know if you have a virus or infection? Some common examples are below.

Illness	Antibiotic needed?
Bronchitis or Chest Cold (in otherwise healthy people)	No
Cold or Runny Nose	No
Flu	No
Middle Ear Infection*	No
Pneumonia*	No
Sinus Infections*	No
Sore Throat (not strep)	No
Strep Throat	**Yes**
Urinary Tract Infection	**Yes**

Antibiotic Resistance

Antibiotic resistance happens when germs like bacteria develop the ability the defeat the drugs designed to kill them, meaning germs continue to grow. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant germs are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to treat. Taking antibiotics only as necessary helps prevent antibiotic resistance.

Ways to prevent antibiotic resistance:

- Talk with your doctor about antibiotic resistance.

- Ask your doctor how to feel better without taking antibiotics.

- Take the prescribed antibiotic exactly as your doctor tells you.

- Safely throw away leftover medication.

- Ask your doctor about vaccines recommended for you and your family to prevent infections that may require an antibiotic.

- Never skip doses.

- Never take an antibiotic for a viral infection like a cold or the flu.

- Never pressure your doctor to prescribe an antibiotic.

- Never save antibiotics for the next time you get sick.

- Never take antibiotics prescribed for someone else.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

*Some illnesses may be treated with an antibiotic if your doctor determines them to be bacterial. This may be the case for pneumonia, ear infections, and sinus infections. Your doctor may want to "wait and see" if the illness requires antibiotics, or if your immune system can fight off the infection on its own.