

What can I expect?

No Prescription

A Health Care Professional may feel that your infection is viral and will clear over time on its own. You may be given advice regarding self-help as mentioned in this leaflet. If you feel your symptoms are getting worse do go back and see your doctor.

Delayed Prescription

You may be offered a delayed prescription. This will involve you going back to the surgery in a few days' time to collect a prescription if your symptoms are not improving. You will be given information regarding what this involves and also offered self-help advice.

Prescription

A Health Care Professional may feel that your infection is bacterial and may give you a course of antibiotics. It is important to take all the antibiotics you are given. Do not save some for the next time you are sick as it may not be the same type of infection. You must only take those antibiotics prescribed for you and you must not share them with anyone else. Any unused medicine must be returned to your local pharmacy.

Remember

- Many common infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not kill viruses.
- Overuse of antibiotics can make them less effective when they are really needed.
- Antibiotics can often cause side effects such as making you feel sick and may also give you diarrhoea (let your doctor know if this happens - do not take anti-diarrhoea medication).
- Your community pharmacist can recommend medication to help ease your symptoms.
- Don't routinely expect a prescription for an antibiotic.
- Speak to your doctor about having the flu vaccine.



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ANTIBIOTICS



**What you and
your family need
to know**

What are Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines that help fight serious infections caused by **bacteria** but don't cure infections caused by **viruses**.

What are viruses?

Viruses are very common. They include all colds and flu, and are also responsible for many infections of the nose, sinuses, ears and throat.

What if I have an infection?

Your body can clear most infections in which case antibiotics do little to speed up recovery. However, there are times when antibiotics are useful. Doctors are skilled at checking you over and will prescribe an antibiotic only if you really need them.



Can I have antibiotics just in case? *

It is not advisable as antibiotics can cause side effects, such as diarrhoea and vomiting, rashes, and sometimes even life threatening allergic reactions. They can also interfere with other medicines you may be taking like the oral contraceptive pill and warfarin. Overuse can also cause antibiotic resistance.

*certain conditions may need to. Your doctor will make you aware if this is the case for you.

Why is 'antibiotic resistance' a problem?

Each time an antibiotic is used there is an increased chance of 'resistance' developing. Antibiotics are becoming less effective at fighting infections because bacteria adapt and find ways to survive. Some bacteria, such as MRSA, are now resistant to several antibiotics. Bacteria become resistant more quickly when antibiotics are used too often or are not used correctly.

Antibiotics must only be used when really needed.

But colds always go to my chest. Surely I need an antibiotic then?

Generally not. If you are normally well, your immune (defence) system will help you recover usually within 10-14 days. However, you need to see your doctor if your cough lasts more than three weeks, if you become short of breath or develop chest pains, or you already have a serious medical condition.



My children are always getting infections. What should I do?

Children often get coughs, colds and ear infections, but they usually fight these successfully on their own. Speak to your community pharmacist who will be able to offer professional advice. You can also get advice from your doctor, but **do not** routinely expect a prescription for an antibiotic as usually these symptoms are caused by **viruses**.



If an antibiotic is not the answer what is?

Speak to your local pharmacist. Medication such as paracetamol or an over-the-counter cold remedy may help ease your symptoms. Drink plenty of fluids and rest if you have a temperature. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water will help stop the spread of infections.

When can I expect to be given antibiotics?

Antibiotics are used to treat serious bacterial infections **not viruses**. If you receive a prescription for antibiotics it is important to complete the full course of treatment