

Antibiotics:

When do you need them?

Antibiotics kill bacteria. As a result of the inappropriate use of antibiotics, more and more bacterial infections are becoming resistant to treatment. So, when is the use of an antibiotic appropriate?

Is it Viral or Bacterial?

Most respiratory infections are caused by viruses against which antibiotics are not effective. Those include the common cold, ear infections, the flu, sinusitis, more sore throats and bronchitis. Low grade fever and production of greenish nasal secretions are common. A throat culture can identify a strep throat for which antibiotic treatment is warranted. Antibiotics may also be necessary for urinary tract infections, spreading skin infections, whooping cough and pneumonia—all of which are more commonly caused by bacteria.

Harmful Outcomes

The unnecessary use of antibiotics is not only a cause of bacterial resistance but can be harmful in many ways. Adverse reactions are common and include generalized itchy rashes, drug fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Of particular importance is diarrhea due to C diff which can be hard to treat and in rare instances can be fatal.

Please refer to the chart below to know when antibiotics are necessary for common illnesses:

Illness	Usual Cause		Antibiotic Needed
	Viruses	Bacteria	
Cold/Runny Nose	✓		NO
Bronchitis/Chest Cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)	✓		NO
Whooping Cough		✓	Yes
Flu	✓		NO
Strep Throat		✓	Yes
Sore Throat (except strep)	✓		NO
Fluid in the Middle Ear (otitis media with effusion)	✓		NO
Urinary Tract Infection		✓	Yes