

What are antibiotics for?

Antibiotics are valuable and useful medications that treat bacterial infections. Used in the right way, they save lives.

Antibiotics do not fight infections caused by viruses, such as:

- colds and flu
- most coughs and bronchitis
- most sore throats.

Taking antibiotics for these infections won't help – but it will increase the risks of antimicrobial resistance or other side effects.

Antibiotics kill not only the bad bacteria that can make you sick, but they also kill the good bacteria that keep you healthy. When the good bacteria are killed, it gives other types of bacteria room to grow, possibly leading to other infections.

Overusing antibiotics leads to antibiotic resistance or antibiotic-resistant infections.

If you have a cold or flu, antibiotics won't help you.

What are we doing?

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is working to manage antimicrobial resistance by monitoring the spread of antibiotic-resistant infections, checking how much we are using antibiotics, and how appropriate that use is.

We have established the AURA (Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia) Surveillance System to better understand the level of antimicrobial resistance in Australia and to help develop strategies to prevent and contain it.

For more information about the AURA Surveillance System please visit safetyandquality.gov.au/aura

If you would like further information about an antibiotic you have been prescribed, you can ask your doctor or talk to your local pharmacist.

Funding for AURA is provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and state and territory health departments.

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Level 5, 255 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW 2000
GPO Box 5480, Sydney NSW 2001
Phone: (02) 9126 3600
Email: AURA@safetyandquality.gov.au

Do I really need antibiotics?

Antibiotics are useful medicines to treat some bacterial infections.

But if you take antibiotics when they're not needed, you give bacteria the chance to develop a resistance to the antibiotic you are using.

Find out about antibiotic resistance and what you can do to stop antibiotic-resistant infections.

Talk to your doctor if you need antibiotics



What are antibiotic-resistant infections?

When bacteria or the germs that cause an infection can't be treated with common antibiotics, they are called 'antibiotic-resistant'.

The more we use antibiotics, the more bacteria can change to prevent the medication working.

Eventually, antibiotics may no longer cure the infections caused by these bacteria.

Why is antibiotic resistance a problem?

Antibiotic resistance is a problem throughout the world and is a major threat to our health. If we take antibiotics when we don't need them, or if we take them for too long, infections are more likely to become resistant to that antibiotic.

Antibiotic resistance increases the risk posed by some treatments that have a high risk of causing infections – like surgery. If there is too much antibiotic resistance this will impact on the effectiveness of these treatments.

Sometimes, even simple infections now need to be treated in hospital with intravenous antibiotics, when they otherwise could have been treated with oral antibiotics at home.

In Australia, we use a lot of antibiotics in the community, in hospitals and in aged care homes. We use antibiotics more than many other developed countries and sometimes they're prescribed when they're not really needed, which means more bacteria develop resistance.

What can I do?

1 You can prevent spreading germs by:

- washing your hands after sneezing or touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- coughing into your elbow instead of your hand
- staying away from work or school if you are unwell
- having the vaccinations your doctor recommends for you
- Ensuring your home environment is clean.

2 If you do get sick:

- ask what you can do to feel better and ease your symptoms while your body fights a viral infection where antibiotics do not work
- let your doctor know that you are worried about antibiotic resistance and only want an antibiotic if you really need it
- ask your doctor if a test would identify the cause of your infection.

3 If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic:

- take your antibiotic exactly as your doctor has prescribed
- never take leftover antibiotics or give them to someone else
- don't keep any repeats of the prescription 'just in case' of future sickness – always see your doctor each time
- after you are better, return any unused medicine to your pharmacy.