

UW Medicine



When Your Doctor Prescribes an Antibiotic

What you should know

This handout explains what antibiotics are, why they are used, and possible side effects.

What is an antibiotic?

An antibiotic is a drug. It is used to treat some infections. It may also be used to prevent an infection.

Antibiotics can save lives. But, they are powerful drugs and should be used only when needed. They must also be taken exactly as your doctor prescribed.

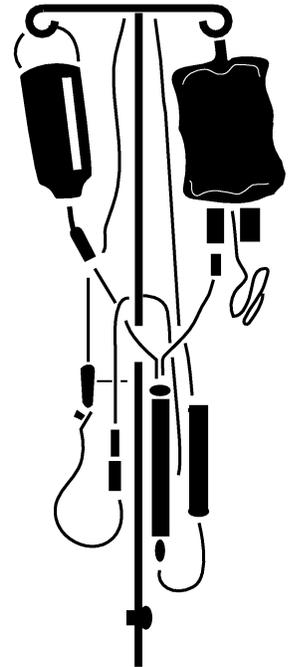
Why do I need an antibiotic?

Your care team thinks that you might:

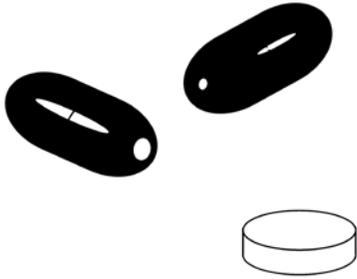
- Have an infection, or
- Be at risk for an infection

What else do I need to know?

- We may run tests before you start taking your antibiotic. These tests will help us know which antibiotic will most likely work best for you.
- We may run more tests while you are taking the drug. These tests will help us watch for any side effects. Based on your test results, your doctor may:
 - **Change** your antibiotic
 - **Stop** your antibiotic if it is no longer needed
- **Important: Take all of your antibiotic pills as your doctor has prescribed.**



While you are in the hospital, you may receive your antibiotic through an intravenous (IV) line.



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Are there side effects?

You may have side effects from your antibiotic. Some may be mild, but others can be more serious.

Taking antibiotics can increase your risk for two serious problems: *Clostridium difficile* infections and *antibiotic-resistant* infections.

***Clostridium difficile* Infections**

Clostridium difficile (*C. diff*) is a type of bacteria. When you take antibiotics, some of the good germs in your gut are destroyed. This allows the *C. diff* bacteria to grow.

Diarrhea is one sign of *C. diff* infection. Tell your care team **right away** if you have new diarrhea:

- While you are taking an antibiotic, or
- Within a few weeks after stopping an antibiotic

Antibiotic-resistant Infections

This type of infection is harder to treat with antibiotics. Taking antibiotics may increase your risk of getting this type of infection in the future. Your care team will watch you for any signs of antibiotic resistance.

To help prevent antibiotic-resistant infections:

- Take antibiotics only when needed, when prescribed by your doctor.
- If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, finish taking all of the pills as instructed.

Questions or Concerns

Your questions are important. If you have any questions or concerns about antibiotics or possible side effects, please talk with your care team.

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