



Antibiotics are medicines that work by killing bacteria or stopping infections from growing

- Most of the time, your body's immune system can protect you against harmful bacteria. However, antibiotics are sometimes required to control infections that are unlikely to get better by themselves without treatment.
- Different types of antibiotics are used to treat different bacterial infections



Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) happens when bacteria change (mutate) and become stronger than the antibiotic, meaning that it doesn't work as well, or sometimes doesn't work at all

- AMR reduces the antibiotic options available to successfully treat infections, particularly if bacteria become resistant to more than one type (these are sometimes called "super bugs")
- The risk of AMR increases when we take antibiotics when they aren't required, or if we don't use them how we're supposed to. **For this reason, it's very important that when you're prescribed an antibiotic you carefully follow the instructions on how much to take, when to take it and for how long.**

Tips for using antibiotics well and preventing AMR:

- ✓ **Follow all instructions on the label about how to take your antibiotic.** There may also be information about how to store it, e.g. some liquid antibiotics need to be kept in the fridge.
- ✓ **Take the full course of antibiotics** you are prescribed, even if you start feeling better
- ✓ **If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember,** unless it's nearly time for the next dose (in which case you can skip it)
- ✓ **If you accidentally take an extra dose, don't worry,** but it may mean that you're more likely to have side effects (read more about this below)
- ✓ **Don't give your antibiotics to anyone else or take someone else's.** You shouldn't have any antibiotics left over; if you do, you can take them back to the pharmacy. **Remember that an antibiotic prescription is just for you, and should only be used to treat the infection you have at the time.**

Antibiotics can have side effects

Most people taking antibiotics don't notice any side effects, or if they do, they're mild. Your doctor or pharmacist will tell you if there is anything in particular you should look out for. If your antibiotic makes you feel worse or you're worried about any new symptoms, talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or call Healthline (**0800 611 116**). Don't stop your antibiotic unless you're told to.

Common side effects include:



Nausea
(feeling sick)



Diarrhoea
(loose or watery bowel motions)



Mild abdominal pain (sore tummy)

Talk to a healthcare professional as soon as you can if you have these side effects:



Rash particularly if it starts spreading or seems severe (see below)



Thrush (white/yellow tongue that can feel furry or affect taste; vaginal thrush can also occur in females)



Serious side effects are rare Get immediate medical help (call 111 or go to the hospital) if you have:

- **Severe or bloody diarrhoea** (or other significant bleeding)
- **A severe allergic reaction** (e.g. swelling, wheezing or difficulty breathing, rashes that feel hot, itchy or are blistering)

Advice for staying healthy, protecting others and avoiding infections in the future



Wash your hands regularly with warm water and soap, especially after going to the toilet, coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitiser can be used if you can't access warm water and soap straight away.



Clean and cover any cuts, grazes or other wounds



Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow when sneezing or coughing



Stay home when sick Keep warm and smokefree




Avoid close contact with people who are sick



Get recommended vaccinations, e.g. COVID-19 and influenza ("flu jab")



Remember: Antibiotics only work on bacteria. They don't kill viruses, which cause most seasonal illnesses (colds and flu). Unless you're prescribed antibiotics for your infection, don't use them!

 For advice on managing colds and flu at home, see: bpac.org.nz/2023/flu.aspx



For further information, see: healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/a/antibiotics/ and healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/a/antibiotic-resistance/