

# Safe Use of Antibiotics

Antibiotics are drugs used to fight infections. They don't work for all illnesses. It is important to be sure you are taking antibiotics appropriately because antibiotic resistance is a growing problem. One cause is the overuse of antibiotics. This is a guide to help you ask the right questions about antibiotic use.

## Questions to ask when you are given an antibiotic.

- Why do I need this antibiotic?
- What kind of infection do I have and is this the best drug to treat it?
- How long should I take it?
- Will I get better without taking it?
- What are the side effects?
- Will it interact with other drugs?
- How and when should I take it?

## When do you really need an antibiotic?

Antibiotics are powerful drugs for fighting infections. They don't work for every sickness. This chart shows when you may be given an antibiotic.

Illness	Virus	Bacteria	Should you expect an antibiotic?
Bronchitis (in healthy children and adults)	✓	✓	May be recommended
Cold or runny nose	✓		No
Ear infection	✓	✓	May be recommended
Flu	✓		No
Fluid in the middle ear	✓		No
Sinus infection	✓	✓	May be recommended
Sore throat (except strep)	✓		No
Strep throat		✓	Yes
Urinary tract infection		✓	Yes

Information available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website

Source: The Joint Commission, 2017; CDC, 2017

**For more facts about antibiotic use, please talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist, or visit [bch.org/antibiotics](http://bch.org/antibiotics).**