

ANTIBIOTICS – WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



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DEAR READER,

Antibiotics are medications used to treat infections caused by bacteria. These medications are very helpful for numerous disorders and may even be life-saving. However, taking antibiotics is not always the right course of action for every infection. This Patient Information explains how antibiotics work and what you should bear in mind when taking them.

► HOW DO ANTIBIOTICS WORK?

Antibiotics help the body's defence system combat pathogenic bacteria. This is necessary when bacteria have invaded and started multiplying in the body. They can trigger an infection and damage specific organs. One example is a bacterial inflammation of the lungs. Some antibiotics kill the bacteria, others prevent them from multiplying. The following principle applies to the use of antibiotics: as often as necessary and as rarely as possible. This is because antibiotics have an impact not only on pathogens but also on useful bacteria that live on our skin and our mucous membranes.

► SIDE-EFFECTS OF ANTIBIOTICS

Most antibiotics are deemed to be safe and well-tolerated medications. Nonetheless, every antibiotic may have side-effects.

Typical side-effects include for instance:

- Gastro-intestinal disorders like diarrhoea, abdominal pain and nausea
- allergic skin reactions like reddening and itching
- vaginal yeast infections in girls and women

Which side-effects and how frequently they can occur depends on which antibiotic you are taking. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for information and read the package insert of the medicinal product.

► WHEN DO ANTIBIOTICS HAVE AN EFFECT?

Most infections are caused by viruses or bacteria. These pathogens cause different disorders. However, at the beginning it is not always easy to distinguish between a bacterial and a viral infection as the symptoms may be similar.

Frequently, bacteria can cause for example:

- Tonsillitis
- Pneumonia
- Meningitis
- Cystitis
- Septic dermatitis

Bacteria are always the cause of for instance:

- Scarlet fever
- Whooping cough
- Tuberculosis

In the case of bacterial disorders it is usually advisable and sometimes even vital to take antibiotics. It is important to know that antibiotics have no effect on viruses.

▶ Treatment with Antibiotics

Examples of disorders that can be caused by viruses:

- most common colds (runny nose, coughing, sore throat, high temperature)
- flu (influenza)
- many forms of intestinal inflammation (diarrhoea)
- measles

Antibiotics are no help whatsoever when it comes to combating these viral diseases.

▶ BEFORE YOU TAKE ANTIBIOTICS

Before you take antibiotics, you should be well informed about the treatment. You can put the following questions for example to your doctor:

- Why do I need an antibiotic?
- What are the possible side-effects?
- For how many days must I take the antibiotic?
- How many times a day should I take it?
- Can I take the antibiotic during meals or should I wait a while before or after?
- Does the antibiotic interact with other medicines I'm taking?

The more frequently antibiotics are prescribed and taken, the higher the risk of resistant bacteria developing and spreading. More detailed information on this subject is provided in the Patient Information, see box.

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Keep to the prescribed times for taking the antibiotics. Three times a day means, for example, every eight hours.
- Take the full course of antibiotics prescribed for you. Even if you feel better, it is important to finish the treatment.
- Do not take any antibiotics prescribed for someone else. Don't ever give your antibiotic to someone else even if their symptoms seem to be very similar to yours.
- It is best to take the antibiotic with some water.
- Inform your doctor about anything unusual and any adverse reactions.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or breast-feeding before you start taking an antibiotic.
- It may be helpful to note down the name, dose, time and any side-effects of antibiotics which you or your child have taken.
- Do not expect your doctor to give you or your child an antibiotic every time you have an infection. They are not effective at all against viruses.

▶ MORE INFORMATION

Other useful links

A selection of vetted information on this subject can be accessed by entering the search term "Antibiotic treatment" on:

www.patienten-information.de

The information leaflet "Resistances to Antibiotics" is available on:

www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformation-fuer-patienten

Sources

This information is based on the latest scientific research findings and recommendations for patients by patients. You can access all the sources used here:

www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformation-fuer-patienten/antibiotika/quellen

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