

# You've Been Prescribed an Antibiotic

## Now What?



Your healthcare team thinks that you or your loved one might have an infection. Some infections can be treated with antibiotics, which are powerful, life-saving drugs. Like all medications, antibiotics have side effects and should only be used when necessary. There are some important things you should know about your antibiotic treatment.

### ◇ Your healthcare team may run tests before you start taking an antibiotic.

- Your team may take samples (e.g., from your blood, urine or other areas) to run tests to look for bacteria. These tests can be important to determine if you need an antibiotic at all and, if you do, which antibiotic will work best.



### ◇ Within a few days, your healthcare team might change or even stop your antibiotic.

- Your team may start you on an antibiotic while they are working to find out what is making you sick.
- Your team might change your antibiotic because test results show that a different antibiotic would be better to treat your infection.
- In some cases, once your team has more information, they learn that you do not need an antibiotic at all. They may find out that you don't have an infection, or that the antibiotic you're taking won't work against your infection. For example, an infection caused by a virus can't be treated with antibiotics. Staying on an antibiotic when you don't need it is more likely to be harmful than helpful.



### ◇ You may experience side effects from your antibiotic.

- Like all medications, antibiotics have side effects. Some of these can be serious.
- Let your healthcare team know if you have any known allergies when you are admitted to the hospital.
- One significant side effect of nearly all antibiotics is the risk of severe and sometimes deadly diarrhea caused by *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*). This occurs when a person takes antibiotics because some good germs are destroyed. Antibiotic use allows *C. difficile* to take over, putting patients at high risk for this serious infection.
  - » Diarrhea caused by *C. difficile* can be serious and must be recognized and treated quickly. When you are taking an antibiotic and you develop diarrhea, let your healthcare team know immediately.
  - » The risk of getting *C. difficile* diarrhea can last for up to a few weeks even after you are no longer getting antibiotics. You should let your healthcare team know if you develop diarrhea even after you are no longer getting an antibiotic.
- Another serious side effect of taking antibiotics is the risk of getting an antibiotic-resistant infection later. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are often more difficult to treat. In some cases, the antibiotic-resistant infections can lead to serious disability or even death.

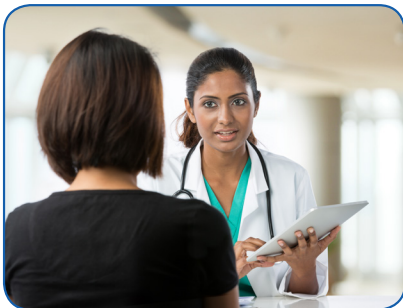


## You've Been Prescribed an Antibiotic – *Now What?*

As a patient or caregiver, it is important to understand your or your loved one's antibiotic treatment. It is especially important for caregivers to speak up when patients can't speak for themselves. Here are some important questions to ask your healthcare team.

- What infection is this antibiotic treating and how do you know I have that infection?
- What side effects might occur from this antibiotic?
- How long will I need to take this antibiotic?
- Is it safe to take this antibiotic with other medications or supplements (e.g., vitamins) that I am taking?
- Are there any special directions I need to know about taking this antibiotic? For example, should I take it with food?
- How will I be monitored to know whether my infection is responding to the antibiotic?
- What tests may help to make sure the right antibiotic is prescribed for me?

**Remember, antibiotics are life-saving drugs and they need to be used properly. If you have any questions about your antibiotics, please talk to your healthcare team.**



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