

# You've Been Prescribed an Antibiotic in the Hospital for an Infection

Your healthcare team has decided you or your loved one has an infection that requires antibiotics, or needs antibiotics to prevent an infection in certain circumstances, such as before surgery. Antibiotics save lives, and they are critical tools for treating a number of common infections, such as pneumonia, and for life-threatening conditions such as sepsis. They need to be used properly because they can cause side effects and lead to antibiotic resistance.

But when antibiotics are needed, the benefits outweigh the risks of side effects or antibiotic resistance. There are some important things you should know about your antibiotic treatment.



**BE  
ANTIBIOTICS  
AWARE**

**SMART USE, BEST CARE**



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

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



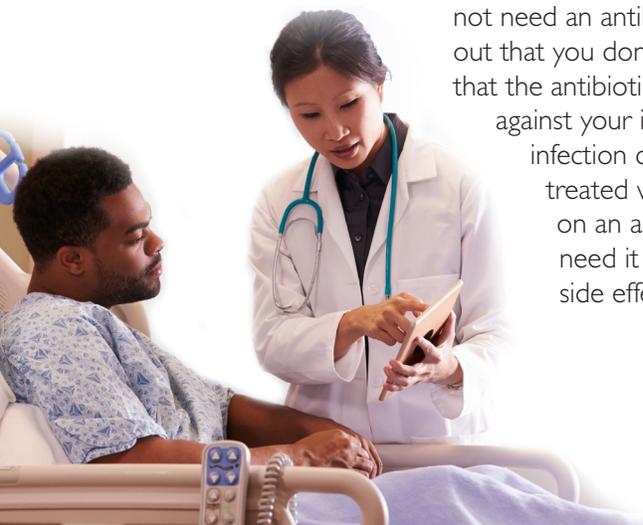
## After a few days of treatment, your healthcare team might change, or even stop, your antibiotic.

- While they are working to find out what is making you sick, your team has started you on an antibiotic.
- If test results show a different antibiotic would be better to treat your infection, they will change your antibiotic.
- Your team may review antibiotic therapy 48 to 72 hours after it is started based on your clinical condition and microbiology culture results, and stop or change antibiotic orders as needed—an important step in your care.
- In some cases, once your team has more information, they might decide 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 won't help you and the side effects could still hurt you.



## 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.
- Common side effects of antibiotics can include rash, dizziness, nausea, yeast infections, and diarrhea.
- The most serious side effects include *Clostridium difficile* infection (also called *C. difficile* or *C. diff*) and life-threatening allergic reactions. *C. difficile* causes diarrhea that can lead to severe colon damage and death.
  - » 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 several months 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.



**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?
- Is the antibiotic being prescribed the most targeted to treat the infection while causing the least side effects?
- 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) 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 should I do if my infection doesn't get better or gets worse?
- 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.



**Montefiore**  
**St. Luke's Cornwall**



To learn more about antibiotic prescribing and use, visit [www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use](http://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use).