
5 Questions

to Consider Before Taking Antibiotics:

- 1** Do I really need antibiotics?
- 2** What are the risks and side effects?
- 3** Are there simpler, safer options?
- 4** How much do they cost?
- 5** How do I take antibiotics so they're safe and effective?

The recommendations in this brochure were developed by the:

- American Academy of Dermatology
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Geriatrics Society

This report is for you to use when talking with your health care provider.

It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

To learn more, please visit
ConsumerHealthChoices.org/antibiotics

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Antibiotics:

Will They Help You or Hurt You?



Consumer Reports suggests asking your health care provider questions before taking any antibiotics.

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Antibiotics can help you. But they can also harm you.

Talk to your health care provider to make sure you only use antibiotics for the right reasons — and at the right time. If you do take antibiotics, make sure to take full amount that you were prescribed.



Do You Really Need Antibiotics?

Seniors often get antibiotics for:

- **Bladder infections**
- **Sinus infections**
- **Eczema** (itchy, red rashes)
- **Wounds, or torn skin, from surgery**
- **Colds and runny noses**

Before you take antibiotics, ask if you really need them. Also ask about the risks and benefits. Remember, antibiotics don't work for viral infections, like the common cold.

Antibiotics Have Risks

Antibiotics can prevent and treat some infections. But they also have these risks:

- **Diarrhea**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Vaginal infections**
- **Allergic reactions, such as:**
 - Blisters, rashes, and face or throat swelling
- **Damage to nerves and tendons**

If you use antibiotics too much or when you don't need them, they may not work for you someday. This is called "antibiotic resistance."

Ways to Use Fewer Antibiotics

Consumer Reports says that you might get fewer infections if you:

- **Wash your hands frequently**
- **Get your vaccines and flu shots**
- **Ask if you can wait a few days before starting antibiotics. Then, call or visit your health care provider again to see if you really do need them.**

If you're in the hospital and have tubes or catheters, ask every day if they can be taken out. This can keep infections away. And make sure everyone washes their hands when they come to see you.

