HealthLink
NCPPO
March 2010
eHouseCall

Doctor's Bag

by Robert Sorrenti, MD
Chief Medical Officer

When Are Antibiotics Necessary?

It's always best to ask your doctor this question, since the answer depends on the diagnosis. Here are some guidelines for treatment of common ailments from The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Ear Infections Ear infections tend to fall into two categories : otitis externa, or "swimmer's ear," is an infection of the ear canal that can be treated with eardrops. Acute otitis media is an inner ear infection often treated with oral antibiotics.

Sinus Infections Thick or green mucus may be an indication of a bacterial infection. Antibiotics are needed for some long-lasting and severe cases.

Cough/Bronchitis Patients rarely need antibiotics for bronchitis.

Sore Throat Viruses cause most cases; however, strep throat should be treated with antibiotics. This condition must be diagnosed by a laboratory test.

Colds Colds are caused by viruses. Antibiotics have no effect on colds.

Please keep in mind, some viral infections may lead to bacterial infections. Don't make the diagnosis yourself. Always keep your doctor informed if an illness gets worse or lasts a long time.

NCPPOInfo

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

Proper Use of Antibiotics

From the American College of Physicians

Antibiotic resistance has become a major public health issue. It results from the misuse or overuse of antibiotics. When an antibiotic is used improperly, it can cause the body's bacteria to change in a way that reduces or eliminates the drug's effectiveness. Not only does this jeopardize the usefulness of these essential drugs, it can be life threatening to some individuals.

What You Can Do to Reduce the Threat of Antibiotic Resistance

- Don't insist on antibiotics for yourself or your children. Talk with your doctor about the risks and benefits of antibiotics and which antibiotic, if any, is appropriate for your problem.
- Remember, most colds, coughs, sore throats and runny noses are caused by viruses, not by bacteria. Antibiotics only work against bacteria.
- Discard any leftover medications immediately. Never share antibiotics with family or friends.
- Wash hands thoroughly and often, and teach your children to do the same. Prevent illnesses by eliminating resistant bacteria and viruses that may spread to others.
- Make sure your family's immunizations are up-to-date. Immunizations prevent disease. The elderly and those with chronic illnesses, in particular, should seek vaccination against influenza and pneumonia.
- If you are prescribed antibiotics, finish the prescription, even if you feel better. If you don't, some partly resistant bacteria may remain and multiply. The infection may return a few weeks later, but a different – probably stronger – drug must be used to treat it and you may have contributed to the drug-resistance bacteria problem.

DidUKnow?

- Every time a person takes antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed but resistant bacteria may be left to grow and multiply.
- The number of bacteria resistant to antibiotics has increased in the last decade. Nearly all signficant bacterial infections are becoming resistant to the most prescribed antibiotic treatments.
- About 70% of bacteria that cause infections in hospitals are resistant to at least one of the drugs most commonly used to treat infections.
- Children are of particular concern because they have the highest rates of antibiotic use. They also have the highest rate of infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
- Tens of millions of antibiotics prescribed in doctors' offices each year are for viral infections which cannot effectively be treated with antibiotics. Doctors cite patient demand as one of the primary reasons why antibiotics are over-prescribed.

Information Sources:
CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Antibiotic Resistance Questions & Answers, June 30, 2009 (http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/antibiotic-resistance-faqs.html)

American College of Family Physicians, Antibiotics: When They Can and Can't Help, October 2009 (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2713162)

US Food and Drug Administration, Preserve a Treasure, April 2009 (www.fda.gov › Drugs › Resources for You)