

Health Tips

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Health Tip: More on Appropriate Use of Antibiotics



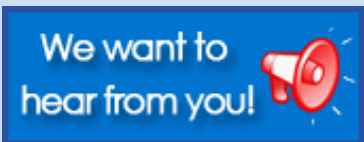
In a previous [Health Tip](#), I discussed the problem of inappropriate antibiotic usage, which can lead to the emergence of resistant bacteria and infections that no longer respond to currently available antibiotics. A recent report in the Journal of the American Medical Association highlights another reason that antibiotic usage should be carefully scrutinized. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that for every 10,000 antibiotic prescriptions written, 10.5 people taking the antibiotic will

have an adverse reaction that requires emergency care. This amounts to about 142,500 visits each year to an Emergency Department. In spite of the fact that most people consider antibiotics to be safe with almost magical effects, in almost 1 in 5 cases of patients treated in an Emergency Department for a medication-related adverse event, the culprit was an antibiotic.

Perhaps even more astounding was the observation that antibiotic reactions occurred in a similar frequency to those due to much more dangerous medications such as blood thinners and insulin. Most of the reactions (80%) that prompted emergency management were allergic in nature, including rash and anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a life-threatening allergic reaction similar to that occurring from receiving venom from a bee sting. Both doctors and consumers of medical care can take partial blame for inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics. Physicians often want to "do something" for their patients even if there is a low likelihood that taking an antibiotic will help. Likewise, patients request, and in some cases demand, treatment with antibiotics with the notion that antibiotics will hasten their recovery from a viral illness.



any other topic or question you have!



The following recommendations are advised when the use of antibiotics is being considered:

1. Do not take antibiotics for a viral infection like a cold, a cough, or the flu. They won't help and they could send you to the Emergency Department with an adverse reaction.
2. Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. The antibiotic may not be appropriate for your illness or it could cause an allergic reaction.
3. Do not save any antibiotics for the next time you get sick and discard any leftover medication once you have finished your prescribed course of treatment.
4. When an antibiotic is being prescribed, ask your doctor about its necessity. In some cases, it may be appropriate to "wait and watch" prior to starting an antibiotic.
5. When you are prescribed an antibiotic, take it exactly as the doctor tells you. Complete the prescribed course even if you are feeling better. If the treatment stops too soon, some bacteria may survive to re-infect you.

Aside from the issue of antibiotic resistance, the JAMA article offered an interesting way of looking at antibiotic use with viral respiratory tract infections. While there is a slight (1 in 4000) chance that an antibiotic will prevent a serious complication of this type of infection, 1 in every 4 people taking an antibiotic will end up with diarrhea and there is a 1 in 1000 chance that the person taking the antibiotic will end up in an Emergency Room with an adverse reaction. Clearly the odds are in favor of avoiding antibiotic use whenever possible.

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