

Antibiotics

A miracle cure? Antibiotics, unfortunately, are not a miracle cure. Most infections in the UK get better without antibiotics. In cases where patients will get better without them, it makes sense for your doctor not to prescribe them.

Overuse - dangerous Harmful bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics if they are prescribed too often. This can affect you, as it may mean that the antibiotic won't work the next time you take it. It can also affect the whole population, even people taking antibiotics for the first time. This is because the bacteria causing their infection could be able to survive antibiotics.

Antibiotic facts

- antibiotics have no effect on viruses (eg colds, flu, most sore throats, and many coughs)
- your body's defence system can often protect against infection without the need for antibiotics
- antibiotics don't just attack the infection they are prescribed for - they can also kill useful bacteria, giving you other problems (eg thrush, diarrhoea)

Taking antibiotics If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is important to take them according to the instructions:

- although you may begin to feel better, you must take the full course, to prevent your illness coming back
- not taking the full course can lead to future antibiotic resistance

Side effects It is quite common to have side effects from antibiotics, such as stomach upset, thrush, diarrhoea and allergic reactions. If you are taking the contraceptive pill, antibiotics can make it less effective.

When to call for advice Many infections can be treated with medicines from the pharmacist. If these do not work, call NHS Direct (08-45-4647), or the surgery. This is especially true if you are experiencing:

- symptoms which are severe or unusually prolonged
- extreme shortness of breath
- coughing up blood or large amounts of yellow or green phlegm

Further Links

- Patient UK on antibiotics - www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/23068884
- NHS Direct – www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk