

Preventing Antibiotic Resistance

Infections can happen anywhere. In some cases, antibiotics that used to treat infections no longer work, and this can be very dangerous.

"Antibiotic resistance is probably the single most important threat that we face as a society in health care today."

Simply put, antibiotic resistance is when a drug normally used to kill germs, or bacteria, in your body just doesn't work. This may make the infection more difficult to treat. Antibiotic resistance can affect anyone. In many cases, it starts at health care facilities.

"Antibiotic resistance is typically caused by the misuse or overuse of antibiotics as prescribed by health care providers."

When you're sick, it's important for your health care provider to figure out if you have a virus or if bacteria are causing your illness.

"A virus and a bacteria are two different organisms and antibiotics are only effective against bacteria."

"When you have influenza or the common cold, an antibiotic is not going to help with that illness. It will only promote the development of resistance."

Here's how antibiotic resistance happens: Everybody has "good" bacteria in their body to protect from infection. But there are also bacteria that can cause illness. Taking an antibiotic will kill the bad bacteria, but it also kills some of the good bacteria. That makes it easier for drug-resistant bacteria to take over. As a result, new infections can be harder to fight because the antibiotics typically used to treat them are becoming less effective.

Prevention starts with you. Try to keep yourself from getting sick in the first place: Get a flu shot as well as other immunizations as recommended by your healthcare professional. These can help prevent development of infection in the first place.

Keep your hands clean to prevent the spread of germs.

If your healthcare provider does prescribe an antibiotic, take it exactly as directed. Never share antibiotics or take an antibiotic prescribed for someone else. Antibiotics are specific for the type of infection.

If you do get sick, ask your doctor if an antibiotic is the best choice or the only choice. If they tell you that an antibiotic is not needed for your illness, follow all of the instructions they provide.

"Don't pressure your health care provider to give you an antibiotic because you may in fact have a viral illness. Remember antibiotics will not help. They have absolutely no effect on a viral disease."

On the other hand, if you have a bacterial illness and an antibiotic is prescribed, be sure to follow your doctor's orders and take the Medication completely.