



American Academy  
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## Health Issues

Like

### Antibiotic Prescriptions For Children

## Why doesn't my pediatrician prescribe antibiotics every time my child is sick?

**Antibiotics** are medicines used to treat specific bacterial infections (such as ear infections and **strep throat**). Infections caused by certain viruses (such as **influenza** [flu] and herpes simplex) are treated with medicines called **antivirals**. Infections caused by fungi (such as **athlete's foot** and yeast infections) are treated with medicines called **antifungals**.

It is important to understand that different types of infections can only be treated if the right medicine is used. For instance, antibiotics are only useful to treat bacterial infections and will not provide any benefit for viral infections. Also, many viral infections are mild and will get better without using medicines. Using unnecessary medicines doesn't help and may actually cause harm.

Before an antibiotic is prescribed, your child's doctor will need to find out if your child's infection is caused by bacteria and can be treated with an antibiotic. If an antibiotic is prescribed, it's important that your child takes it for as long as recommended, even if your child feels better. If your child stops taking the antibiotic too soon, the infection may not be treated completely and the symptoms may start again.

### Resistant Bacteria

Antibiotics can kill or slow down certain bacteria from growing, but each time they're used there's a chance that resistant bacteria will develop. These resistant bacteria are more likely to cause your child's next infection and may make it harder to treat your child the next time. A few bacterial infections have already become resistant to many antibiotics and are untreatable. There's a growing concern that more bacterial infections will become untreatable by commonly prescribed antibiotics.

Resistant bacteria are bacteria that are no longer killed by most antibiotics. Repeated use and misuse of antibiotics are some of the main causes of the increase in resistant bacteria. These resistant bacteria can also be spread to other children and adults.

### Using Antibiotics Safely

Keep the following in mind if your child gets sick:

- **Antibiotics aren't always the answer when your child is sick.** Ask your child's doctor what the best treatment is for your child.
- **Antibiotics work against bacterial infections.** They don't work on colds and flu.
- **Finish all prescribed doses of an antibiotic.** If your child feels better and stops the medicine too soon, the infection could return.
- **Don't use one child's antibiotic for a sibling or friend;** you may give the wrong medicine and cause harm.
- **Throw away unused antibiotics.** Do not save antibiotics for later use; some out-of-date medicines can actually be harmful. Call Poison Help at **1-800-222-1222** or check the **[US Food and Drug Administration](#)** Web site for information on the safe disposal of medicines.

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