



## Why Antibiotics Won't Help a Cold or Flu

Infections are caused by either bacteria or viruses. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial illnesses. A medicine has not been developed that will kill cold or flu viruses, so you have to allow your body's own defense system to fight the virus. Most common colds and flu are caused by a virus not bacteria.

### **Viral or Bacterial?**

#### *Viral Infections*

- Usually involve different parts of the body: sore throat, runny nose, headaches, muscle aches. In the abdominal area, viruses cause nausea, vomiting and or diarrhea.
- Typical viral infections: cold, flu, stomach flu.
- Antibiotics *do not* help.

#### *Bacterial Infections*

- May follow a viral infection that does not improve.
- Usually localized at a single point in the body: sinuses, ear, lungs.
- Typical bacterial infections: strep throat, ear infection.
- Antibiotics *do* help.

### **Good Reasons Not to Use Antibiotics for a Cold or Flu**

Antibiotics will not cure the common cold, flu or any other viral illness. Unless you have a bacterial infection it's best to avoid the possible adverse effects of antibiotics such as:

- **Secondary infections:** Antibiotics kill all the bacterial in your body that are sensitive to them, including those that help your body. They may destroy the bacterial balance in your body, leading to stomach upset, diarrhea, yeast infections or other problems.
- **Bacterial resistance:** Bacteria build resistance to antibiotics that are used frequently. When you take an antibiotic, the bacteria it affects struggle to survive. The bacteria may successfully change so that it will become less vulnerable to the antibiotic. As a result the antibiotic will not work on a future bacterial infection.
- **Side effects & allergies:** Antibiotics sometimes cause allergic or toxic reactions which may be mild, severe or life-threatening.
- **Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial illnesses, they have no effect on viruses.**