



# COLDS, FLU, AND OTHER RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES: DON'T RUSH TO ANTIBIOTICS

If you have a sore throat, cough, or sinus pain, you might expect to take antibiotics. After all, you feel bad, and you want to get better fast. But antibiotics don't help most respiratory infections, and they can even be harmful.

## ANTIBIOTICS KILL BACTERIA, NOT VIRUSES.

Antibiotics fight infections caused by bacteria. But most respiratory infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics can't cure a virus.

Viruses cause:

- All colds and flu.
- Almost all sinus infections.
- Most bronchitis (chest colds).
- Most sore throats, especially with a cough, runny nose, hoarse voice, or mouth sores.

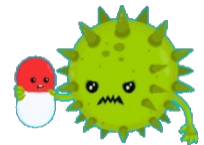


## ANTIBIOTICS HAVE RISKS.

Antibiotics can upset the body's natural balance of good and bad bacteria. Antibiotics can cause:

- Nausea, vomiting, and severe diarrhea.
- Vaginal infections.
- Nerve damage.
- Torn tendons.
- Life-threatening allergic reactions.

Many adults go to emergency rooms because of antibiotic side effects.



## OVERUSE OF ANTIBIOTICS IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM.

Wide use of antibiotics breeds "superbugs." These are bacteria that become resistant to antibiotics.

They can cause drug-resistant infections, even disability or death. The resistant bacteria—the superbugs—can also spread to family members and others.

## HOW TO MANAGE RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

### Try to avoid them.

Wash your hands often and well with plain soap and water. And get these vaccines:

- **Flu (influenza) vaccine.** Get this once a year. October or November is best.

- **Pneumonia vaccine.** When you turn 65, get two shots, a year apart. If you are younger and have heart, lung, or liver disease, diabetes, problems with alcohol, or you smoke, ask your health care provider if you should get the shots.
- **Tdap vaccine for tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough).** All adults should get this once. Then get a tetanus-diphtheria booster shot every 10 years. Pregnant women should get a Tdap shot during their third trimester.

### Relieve symptoms.

- Get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Use a humidifier and clean it daily.
- **Ease pain and reduce fever with:** Acetaminophen (Tylenol® and generic) or ibuprofen (Advil® and generic)
- **For nasal discomfort** use saline (salt water) drops or spray.
- **To soothe a sore throat,** gargle with salt water, drink warm beverages, or eat or drink something cool.
- **To ease a cough,** breathe steam from a kettle or shower. For mild, short-term relief, try an over-the-counter cough medicine that has dextromethorphan.