

You've Been Prescribed an Antibiotic

Now What?

Your healthcare team thinks you or your loved one might have an infection. Some infections can be treated with antibiotics, which are powerful, life-saving drugs. Like all medications, antibiotics have side effects and should only be used when necessary. There are some important things you should know about your antibiotic treatment:

- Your healthcare team may run tests before you start taking an antibiotic.
- Your team may take samples (e.g., from your blood, urine or other areas) to run tests to look for bacteria. These tests can be important to determine if you need an antibiotic and, if you do, which antibiotic will work best.
- Within a few days, your healthcare team might change or even stop your antibiotic.
- Your team may start you on an antibiotic while they are working to find out what is making you sick.
- Your team might change your antibiotic because test results show that a different antibiotic would better treat your infection.
- In some cases, once your team has more information, they may learn that you do not need an antibiotic at all. They may find out that you don't have an infection, or that the antibiotic you're taking won't work against your infection. For example, an infection caused by a virus can't be treated with antibiotics. Staying on an antibiotic when you don't need it is more likely to be harmful than helpful.
- You may experience side effects from your antibiotic.
- Like all medications, antibiotics have side effects; and some of these can be serious.
- Let your healthcare team know if you have any known allergies when you are admitted to the hospital.
- One significant side effect of nearly all antibiotics is the risk of severe and sometimes deadly diarrhea caused by *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. difficile*). This may occur when a person takes antibiotics. Antibiotic use allows *C. difficile* to take over, putting patients at high risk for this serious infection.
- Diarrhea caused by *C. difficile* can be serious and must be recognized and treated quickly. When you are taking an antibiotic and you develop diarrhea, let your healthcare team know immediately.
- The risk of getting *C. difficile* diarrhea can last for up to a few weeks even after you are no longer taking antibiotics. You should let your healthcare team know if you develop diarrhea even after you have stopped taking your antibiotic.
- Another serious side effect of taking antibiotics is the risk of getting an antibiotic-resistant infection. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are often more difficult to treat. In some cases, the antibiotic-resistant infections can lead to serious disability or even death.

Source: CDC, Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion