Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

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Antibiotics: Important information.

A patient's guide

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are used to treat or prevent some types of bacterial infection. They work by killing bacteria or preventing them from spreading. But they do not work for everything.
Many mild bacterial infections get better on their own without using antibiotics.

When it comes to antibiotics, take your doctor's advice on whether you need them or not. Antibiotic resistance is a big problem – taking antibiotics when you do not need them can mean they will not work for you in the future.

When antibiotics are needed

Antibiotics may be used to treat bacterial infections that:

- are unlikely to clear up without antibiotics
- could infect others
- could take too long to clear without treatment
- carry a risk of more serious complications

People at a high risk of infection may also be given antibiotics as a precaution, known as antibiotic prophylaxis.

Antibiotic resistance and 'superbugs'

Antibiotics are no longer routinely used to treat infections because:

- ✓ many infections are caused by viruses, so antibiotics are not effective
- ✓ antibiotics are often unlikely to speed up the healing process and can cause side effects
- ✓ the more antibiotics are used to treat trivial conditions, the more likely they are to become ineffective for treating more serious conditions

Both the NHS and health organisations across the world are trying to reduce the use of antibiotics, especially for health problems that are not serious.

For example, antibiotics are no longer routinely used to treat:

- ✓ chest infections
- ✓ ear infections in children
- ✓ sore throats

The overuse of antibiotics in recent years means they're becoming less effective and has led to the emergence of "superbugs". These are strains of bacteria that have developed resistance to many different types of antibiotics, including:

- ✓ MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)
- ✓ Clostridium difficile (C. diff)
- ✓ the bacteria that cause multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis

These types of infections can be serious and challenging to treat, and are becoming an increasing cause of disability and death across the world.