

When antibiotics are needed

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'Get Smart' tips from an expert to prevent their overuse.

(HealthDay)—Overuse of antibiotics is one of the main causes of antibiotic resistance, a major public health threat in the United States.

In an effort to combat the problem, the eighth annual "Get Smart About Antibiotics Week" is being sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other partners from Nov. 16-22.

"All use of antibiotics leads, eventually, to resistant bacteria, where those antibiotics just won't work anymore. And overuse—unnecessary use for viruses or colds—leads to resistance that much faster," said Dr. Saul Hymes, a specialist in pediatric infectious diseases at Stony Brook Children's Hospital, in Stony Brook, N.Y.

People must understand that antibiotics cure bacterial infections, not viral infections such as colds or the flu, he said in a hospital news release.

In most cases, symptoms of upper respiratory infections—including [sore throats](#), ear and [sinus infections](#), colds and bronchitis—can be eased by getting plenty of rest; drinking enough fluids; avoiding smoking and secondhand smoke; and taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve pain or fever.

Soothe a sore throat with ice chips, popsicles, lozenges (only for older children and adults), warm beverages, or by gargling with salt water, Hymes recommended.

A warm compress over the nose and forehead can help relieve sinus pressure. For [older children](#) and adults, other options include a decongestant or saline nasal spray, or breathing in steam from the shower or a bowl of hot water.

Over-the-counter medications can help. Consult with your doctor or pharmacist about their use.

If your doctor does prescribe antibiotics, it's important to take every dose. Never share antibiotics, never use them without a prescription, and never keep extra antibiotics "for the next time," Hymes said.

You can reduce your family's chances of needing [antibiotics](#) by taking preventive measures such as getting recommended vaccinations, maintaining good hand hygiene and covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, he added.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [antibiotic resistance](#).

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