

Non-prescription Antibiotic Use: What You Need to Know



What Is Non-Prescription Antibiotic Use?

Non-prescription use means taking an antibiotic that was **not prescribed by a healthcare provider for your current illness**.

Common Examples of Non-Prescription Antibiotic Use:

-   Using leftover antibiotics from a previous illness to treat a new illness.
-   Taking antibiotics prescribed to someone else, such as a friend, a family member or even a pet.
-   Buying antibiotics over the counter, such as from pharmacies in other countries or from unregulated websites online.

Thinking About Taking Antibiotics Without a Prescription? Here's What You Should Know First:



- 1 Symptoms Can Be Misleading**
Symptoms from infections caused by viruses and bacteria often look the same (such as fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue), making it hard to know what's really causing them.
- 2 Antibiotics don't work on all bacterial or most viral infections**
Only a healthcare provider has the expertise to choose the right one for your illness.
- 3 Not every illness is an infection**
Other health conditions can cause fever or tiredness. Antibiotics won't help in those cases and could delay getting the right treatment.
- 4 Antibiotic resistance grows with every dose of antibiotic taken and may spread to others**
Bacteria learn to resist antibiotics. Using antibiotics only when needed helps make sure they still work in the future.
- 5 Antibiotics may cause *C. difficile* associated diarrhea**
C. difficile is a dangerous bacteria that causes severe or life-threatening diarrhea.

The Bottom Line

Use antibiotics wisely, **only when prescribed for your current illness**, to help protect your health and the health of your community.

