

5 QUESTIONS to Ask Your Doctor Before You Take Antibiotics

1 Do I really need antibiotics? Antibiotics fight bacterial infections, like strep throat, whooping cough and symptomatic bladder infections. But they don't fight viruses—like common colds, flu, or most sore throats and sinus infections. Ask if you have a bacterial infection.

2 What are the risks? Antibiotics can cause diarrhea, vomiting, and more. They can also lead to “antibiotic resistance”—if you use antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you do need them.

3 Are there simpler, safer options? Sometimes all you need is rest and plenty of liquid. You can also ask about antibiotic ointments and drops for conditions like pink eye or swimmer's ear.

4 How much do they cost? Antibiotics are usually not expensive. But if you take them when you don't need them, they may not work for you in the future—and that may cost you a lot of time and money.

5 How do I safely take antibiotics? If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, take them exactly as directed, even if you feel better.

Use these 5 questions to talk to your doctor about when you need antibiotics—and when you don't.

Antibiotics can help prevent or treat some infections. But if you use them for the wrong reason, they may cause unnecessary harm.

Talk to your doctor to make sure you only use antibiotics for the right reasons—and at the right time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Use your smartphone to access our complete Choosing Wisely report on antibiotics.

