

When Do I Need Antibiotics?

We use antibiotics to kill bacterial infections. Not all antibiotics kill all bacteria. Choosing the right antibiotic for the right infection ensures better outcomes. Often patients will take “left over” antibiotics prescribed for one type of infection hoping it will help their current infection. It may or may not be the right or best choice for the current infection. It may not work at all.

Patients usually want “a strong antibiotic so I get well sooner.” We sure understand about wanting to get well sooner. The choice of antibiotic is determined by the most likely bacterial cause for the specific infection. The dose is often weight based, sometimes age based. Using a “stronger” or broader spectrum antibiotic than is necessary can do more harm than good. Inappropriate use of antibiotics has led to significant bacterial resistance to some antibiotics, creating “super bugs” that can be very difficult to treat.

So be cautious about using antibiotics and reserve their use when necessary and appropriate. No matter how much we don’t like it, antibiotics are not a cure for the common cold or any other viral infection. Save their use for when you really need them.

Some common bacterial infections we do treat with antibiotics are bladder infections, prostate infections, skin infections, bacterial sinusitis, pneumonia, strep throat, and middle ear infections.