

Patient Information Handout:
The Dangers of Taking Antibiotics

What Are Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medications used to treat bacterial infections. They work by killing bacteria or stopping their growth. However, they do not work against viruses, such as those that cause the flu, colds, or most sore throats.

Why Should You Be Cautious with Antibiotics?

While antibiotics can be life-saving when used correctly, misuse can lead to serious health risks. Below are some important dangers to be aware of:

1. Antibiotic Resistance

- What it is: Bacteria can evolve and become resistant to antibiotics, meaning the medication no longer works.
- Why it's dangerous: Infections caused by resistant bacteria are harder to treat and may require stronger, more expensive, or more toxic medications.
- How to prevent it: Only take antibiotics when prescribed and follow your doctor's instructions exactly.

2. Side Effects and Allergic Reactions

- Antibiotics can cause side effects like nausea, diarrhea, dizziness, and yeast infections.
- Some people may have allergic reactions, ranging from mild rashes to severe reactions like anaphylaxis, which is life-threatening.

3. Harm to Good Bacteria in Your Body

- Your body naturally contains beneficial bacteria that help with digestion and immune function.
- Antibiotics can kill these good bacteria, leading to issues such as digestive problems, yeast infections, and increased risk of other infections, like *Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff), which causes severe diarrhea.

4. Ineffectiveness Against Viruses

- Taking antibiotics for viral infections (like colds or the flu) will not help you feel better and may contribute to resistance and unnecessary side effects.

5. Risk of Drug Interactions

- Antibiotics can interact with other medications, reducing their effectiveness or causing harmful effects. Always tell your doctor about any medications or supplements you are taking.

How to Use Antibiotics Safely

- Only take antibiotics when prescribed by a healthcare provider.
- Complete the full course of antibiotics, even if you start feeling better before finishing the medication.
- Do not share antibiotics with others or take someone else's prescription.
- Never use leftover antibiotics from a previous illness.

If you have any questions or concerns about antibiotics, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Proper antibiotic use helps protect your health and prevents the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

For more information, visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use

World Health Organization (WHO): www.who.int