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Not every illness should be treated with antibiotics

Trisha Koriath

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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Not every illness should be treated with antibiotics

Your child has been suffering from a cough, ear pain and stuffed up nose for days. Should you ask your pediatrician to prescribe an antibiotic? The answer might surprise you.



Many children receive antibiotics to treat symptoms that will get better on their own. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) warns that using antibiotics when they are not needed can harm your child and can cause antibiotic resistance, which makes germs stronger and serious infections harder to treat. Because of this, doctors are careful to prescribe antibiotics only when they are absolutely necessary.

Many illnesses take a while to get better on their own. On average, a child's earache will last seven to eight days; a sore throat lasts about two to seven days; a common cold lingers for 15 days; and other respiratory infections can hang on for about 16 days, according to a recent scientific study.

According to the AAP, antibiotics will not cure illnesses caused by viruses, such as colds, bronchitis, some ear infections, sore throats (other than strep throat), viral pneumonia and viral meningitis. Antibiotics should be used only when a person has an infection caused by bacteria that will not go away by itself. These illnesses include severe (acute) ear infections, strep throat, long-lasting sinus infections, bacterial pneumonia and bacterial meningitis (a serious disease that is treated in the hospital).

Your pediatrician will determine whether your child's infection is caused by bacteria or a virus. The doctor then will consider any harm an antibiotic may cause and choose the right type of antibiotic for the illness.

If the doctor does prescribe an antibiotic for your child, follow the directions exactly and finish all doses of the medicine. Do not share antibiotics with anyone else. Throw away any leftover medicine as directed on the label. The Food and Drug Administration suggests scratching personal information off labels before discarding. Keep children and pets safe by storing and discarding medications out of reach.

— *Trisha Koriath*

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