

To help prevent spread of viral infections:

Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, dispose of tissues following use and remember to wash your hands regularly.

What about bacterial infections?

Normally infections such as sore throat, cough/bronchitis, sore ear and nasal symptoms are caused by viral infections, but sometimes they can be caused by bacterial infections.

Your own immune system can clear many of these infections without the need for antibiotics. Antibiotics do little to speed up your recovery from most common infections.

However if you have a more serious bacterial infection such as pneumonia you will need treatment with antibiotics. This is why it is important to use antibiotics wisely, to ensure they are more likely to work when you really need them.

When should I contact my doctor?

Contact your doctor if your symptoms start to change or get worse, or if you do not start to improve after a few days.



Remember:

- Antibiotics DO NOT treat viral infections.
- Antibiotics are useful for many bacterial infections and may be life-saving for infections such as pneumonia and meningitis.
- Avoiding unnecessary use of antibiotics may slow down the development of antibiotic resistance.
- Healthcare workers, patients and patient's carers all have an important role to play in ensuring antibiotics remain effective.

Responsible use of antibiotics will help to ensure they are more likely to work when we really need them.

**For further information:
Speak to your doctor,
practice nurse
or pharmacist**



Do I need an antibiotic?



Patient information leaflet on common infections in adults: Coughs, Colds & Sore Throats, Runny/Blocked Nose

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are important medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria.

Antibiotics **DO NOT** treat infections caused by viruses.



What are viral infections?

Viral infections are very common. They include all colds and flu, and many infections of the nose, sinuses, ears, throat and chest (coughs / bronchitis).

Why should antibiotics NOT be used to treat viral infections?

- Antibiotics **DO NOT** kill viruses.
- Taking antibiotics that you do not need, e.g. to treat viral infections can lead to antibiotic resistance.
- Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria are no longer killed by antibiotics. As a result some antibiotics have become less effective against the bacterial infections they were designed to treat.
- Infections caused by bacteria resistant to antibiotics can be very difficult to treat.
- In recent years fewer new antibiotics have been discovered. We need to protect the antibiotics we have, to ensure they continue to work now and in the future.

How can antibiotic resistance be avoided?

You can help to avoid antibiotic resistance by only taking antibiotics when you really need them and when they have been recommended for you by a healthcare professional.

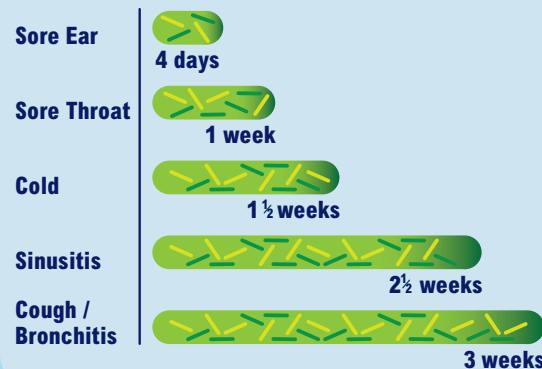
If you are prescribed an antibiotic, follow the directions for use carefully and always remember to complete the full recommended course.

Antibiotics often cause side-effects

Antibiotics may cause side-effects such as thrush, diarrhoea, rash and stomach upset. They can also cause allergic reactions, which can sometimes be severe.

How long does it take to get better?

If you are normally well, your own immune system will usually start to clear up most common infections within a few days, without the need for antibiotics. However it may take a little bit longer for symptoms to clear completely. See below:



Treatment options to ease symptoms

No treatment	Many common infections are mild and will clear up without any treatment.
Rest	This will allow your immune system to fight the infection.
Pain & fever relief	Take paracetamol or ibuprofen regularly. Do not take more than the recommended dose.
Fluids	Drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit-juices to avoid dehydration.
Mouthwash/gargles	Using a simple mouthwash such as warm salty water at frequent intervals may ease a sore throat.
Steam inhalation	Inhaling steam from a shower may help clear a stuffed up nose. This may be helpful before bedtime. Care should be taken to avoid any risk of scalding.
Over-the-counter medicines (OTC)	Ask your community pharmacist for advice. <i>Cough and cold medicines bought OTC are not recommended for children under 6 years of age.</i>