

Why do I not always get antibiotics?

In short

- Antibiotics are medicines that help stop infections caused by bacteria.
- Antibiotics do not help infections caused by a virus.
- Antibiotics can cause side effects, such as nausea or a red skin rash.
- Take antibiotics as directed on the prescription.
- Call your doctor if you get sicker or if you have a fever for more than 3 days.
- By taking antibiotics too often, bacteria can become insensitive. This is called resistance.

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines that help stop infections caused by bacteria. But antibiotics don't work for all infections.

There are different types of infections:

- Most infections are caused by a virus, like with a cold or flu.
- Some infections are caused by bacteria, such as pneumonia, a bladder infection and some STDs.
- Sometimes a viral infection can be further infected by bacteria. This can happen with an infection in the throat, lungs, ear or eye. The bacteria make the infection worse. This can make the fever worse. Or bring the fever back after it has been gone for a few days.

How do antibiotics work?

Antibiotics work well against bacterial infections. The antibiotics kill the bacteria or slow its growth.

Antibiotics don't work against viral infections, like a cold or flu. That is why the doctor does not give you antibiotics for these.

There are many types of antibiotics. Like penicillin, for example. Each type of antibiotic works against different bacteria.

Disadvantages of antibiotics

Antibiotics also have disadvantages. These are listed below:

- **Antibiotics can cause side effects, such as:**

- nausea and vomiting
- itchy red rash on the skin.

- **Antibiotics also fight the 'good' bacteria**

A disadvantage of antibiotics is that they also work against bacteria that we need. For example, bacteria in our intestines that help digest our food. When antibiotics also fight these 'good' bacteria, 'bad' bacteria sometimes get the chance to grow.

- **Bacteria can become insensitive (resistant)**

If antibiotics are often used against bacteria, the bacteria can become resistant. The bacteria are then no longer sensitive to these antibiotics. If you develop an infection from the insensitive bacteria, antibiotics will no longer help. You could become very ill. Sometimes other antibiotics can still help.

When should I call the doctor if I am taking antibiotics?

Antibiotics are usually used for infections with severe symptoms that last a long time, or for symptoms that come back after you felt better.

Please call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- You feel increasingly sick. For example, difficulty breathing, lack of energy or exhaustion.
- The fever lasts more than 3 days.
- The fever comes back after being gone for a few days.

- You are in severe pain. For example, pain when urinating, pain when breathing or pain in your neck.
- Your skin turns very white or grey.
- You get a red rash on your skin.
- You are concerned about any other symptoms you may have.

If you get side effects from the antibiotics or they do not help, please call your doctor. Do not stop the antibiotics yourself. Always consult your doctor first.

More information about antibiotics?

You can find more information about antibiotics on the [RIVM](#) site.

You can find more information about medicines on [apothek.nl](#). Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how to take your medicine.