



Does stopping a course of antibiotics early lead to antibiotic resistance?

Online Q&A

July 2017

Q: Does stopping a course of antibiotics early lead to antibiotic resistance?

A: There has been a lot of research into how long antibiotic courses should be, to determine the shortest possible length of course needed to completely kill all bacteria.

If you are being treated for an infection, the kind of antibiotics your doctor prescribes and the length of the course should be based on the best evidence.

Feeling better, or an improvement in symptoms, does not always mean that the infection has completely gone. Your doctor has had years of training and has access to the latest evidence – so always follow their advice.

Evidence is emerging that shorter courses of antibiotics may be just as effective as longer courses for some infections. Shorter treatments make more sense – they are more likely to be completed properly, have fewer side effects and also likely to be cheaper. They also reduce the exposure of bacteria to antibiotics, thereby reducing the speed by which the pathogen develops resistance.

WHO publishes guidelines about treatments for different infections and recommends treatment durations and doses of antibiotics based on the best clinical evidence for each case. We continuously review the latest research so that we can provide updated recommendations to health professionals.

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