MEDICINAL DRUGS

**A substance or compound presented as possessing properties that can cure or prevent diseases in humans and animals is defined as a medicinal drug.**

Medicines act in a variety of ways. Some can cure an illness by killing or halting the spread of invading germs, such as bacteria and viruses. Others are used to treat cancer by killing cells as they divide or preventing them from multiplying. Some drugs replace missing substances or correct low levels of natural body chemicals such as some hormones or vitamins. Medicines can even affect parts of the nervous system that control a body process.

Nearly everyone has taken an antibiotic. This type of medicine fights bacterial infections. Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic for things like [strep throat](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/strep-throat.html) or an ear infection. Antibiotics work either by killing bacteria or halting their multiplication so that the body's immune system can fight off the infection.

Medicines can help control things like [high blood pressure (hypertension)](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/hypertension.html) or high cholesterol. These drugs don't cure the underlying problem, but they can help prevent some of its body-damaging effects over time.

Among the most important medicines are [immunizations](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/immunizations.html) (or vaccines). These keep people from getting sick in the first place by immunizing, or protecting, the body against some infectious diseases. Vaccines usually contain a small amount of an agent that resembles a specific germ or germs that have been modified or killed. When someone is vaccinated, it primes the body's immune system to "remember" the germ so it will be able to fight off infection by that germ in the future.

Although some medicines require [a prescription](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/rx-filled.html), some are available in stores. You can buy many medicines for pain, fever, cough, or allergies without a prescription. But just because a medicine is available over-the-counter (OTC), that doesn't mean it's free of side effects. Take OTC medicines with the same caution as those prescribed by a doctor.

TYPES OF MEDICINES