



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Colds and flu – antibiotics

URL of this page: //medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002070.htm

Colds and flu – antibiotics

Antibiotics DO NOT cure colds and flus.

Information

Antibiotics fight infections that are caused by bacteria. They do not treat infections that are caused by a virus. Colds and flu are caused by viruses. If you have a viral infection, antibiotics WILL NOT make you better.

The overuse of antibiotics can:

- Kill normal ("healthy") bacteria that live in your body. This may cause nausea and diarrhea. Women can get vaginal yeast infections.
- Increase the risk of drug-resistant bacterial infections.
- Put you at risk of an allergic reaction.

Do not take antibiotics when they will not treat an illness.

Alternative Names

Antibiotics - colds and flu

References

Husain AN. The lung. In: Kumar V, Abbas AK, Aster JC, eds. *Robbins & Cotran Pathologic Basis of Disease*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2021:chap 15.

Lopez SMC, Williams JV. The common cold. In: Kliegman RM, St. Geme JW, Blum NJ, Shah SS, Tasker RC, Wilson KM, eds. *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*. 21st ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:chap 407.

Roginski MA, Atchinson PR. Upper respiratory tract infections. In: Walls RM, ed. *Rosen's Emergency Medicine: Concepts and Clinical Practice*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2023:chap 61.

Review Date 2/8/2024

Updated by: Linda J. Vorvick, MD, Clinical Professor, Department of Family Medicine, UW Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

Learn how to cite this page



Health Content
Provider
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC, for Health Content Provider (www.urac.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.



National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health