



CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

GET SMART: SAVE MONEY BY UNDERSTANDING MISUSE OF ANTIBIOTICS



Have you ever wondered if you or your loved ones truly need all those Antibiotics lying in your home cupboards or stacked on your bedside table?

Don't you think you need to take another look at how much you are regularly spending on these drugs when antibiotics are not the answer for every illness?

Safe use of antibiotics can not only save lives, but can save significant healthcare dollars.

Much of modern medicine is now underpinned by antibiotics. From tooth infection to cancer treatment to skin infection and transplants – antibiotics are regarded as essential to prevent and treat infection. Most of us have grown up with these miracle drugs, which are readily available.

However, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics threatens the usefulness of these drugs, causing a global health crisis with Antibiotics-Resistance.

This Factsheet looks at how consumers, health workers and pharmacists can help control the misuse of antibiotics to slow down or stop the emergence of antibiotic resistant germs called “superbugs”.

Why should we be worrying about the misuse of Antibiotics?

Antibiotic resistance is not just a problem for the person with the infection. Some resistant bacteria have the potential to spread to others, promoting antibiotic resistant infections. Since it will be many years before new antibiotics are available to treat some resistant infections, we need to improve the ways we use antibiotics.

Antibiotic resistance leads to higher medical costs, prolonged hospital stays and increased death. It poses a major threat to public health by increasing the complexity and cost of treatments and reducing the probability of successful outcomes. Without effective antibiotics, many routine treatments will become increasingly dangerous. Setting broken bones, basic operations, even chemotherapy and animal health-all rely on access to antibiotics that work.

Cause of Antibiotics Resistance

- Over-prescribing of Antibiotics per patient
- Prescriptions that do not follow clinical guidelines
- Slower rate of development of new antibiotics
- Poor hygiene practices and poor sanitation around homes and workplaces
- Poor infection-control in hospitals
- Patients self-medicating inappropriately or adhering carelessly to prescribed treatment
- Not completing the course of antibiotics as prescribed
- Overuse of antibiotics in livestock, poultry and fish farming

What you can do

- Always follow your doctor's advice on when and how to use antibiotics
- Consult your doctor or nearest health facility if you seem to suffer any side effects after taking antibiotics
- Only use antibiotics when they have been prescribed by a doctor
- Always take the full course of medication prescribed, even if you feel better after a few days
- Never use antibiotics leftover from an earlier bout of sickness or someone else's prescription
- Never share antibiotics with others
- Don't stock antibiotics in your home
- Never pressure your doctor to prescribe an antibiotic
- Prevent infections by regularly washing your hands, avoiding unprotected contact with sick people and keeping your vaccinations up to date
- Avoid using your leftover prescribed antibiotics in animal feed



What health workers/pharmacists can do

- Explain to the patient the purpose, use and possible side effects of the antibiotic
- Only prescribe and dispense antibiotics if your patients genuinely need them
- Prescribe and dispense the right antibiotics, at the right dosage, for the right duration
- Provide advice to patients for any unwanted effects and action to be taken after taking the prescribed antibiotics
- Ensure the antibiotics have not passed their expiry date
- Provide advice on alternative medicines or remedies to relieve symptoms of colds and flu without antibiotics
- Advise patients why it is important that they comply fully with the treatment when a doctor has prescribed antibiotics for them

Antibiotics do not cure viral infections such as:

- o Colds or flu
- o Runny noses
- o Muscle pain
- o Headache

Using antibiotics for viral infections:

- o Will NOT cure the infection
- o Will NOT help you feel better
- o Will NOT keep others from catching your illness



What can happen if antibiotics do not work?

- Infections may often last longer
- More severe illness may develop
- More doctor visits or extended hospital stays may become necessary
- More expensive and toxic medications may be required
- Some resistant infections may even cause death
- More invasive or radical treatments are instituted

Questions to ponder before you ask for antibiotics:

1. Do I really need Antibiotics?

Antibiotics treat bacterial infection. But they don't fight viruses such as the common cold, most sore throats and sinus infections – Ask your healthcare provider what other treatments are available to treat your symptoms before taking antibiotics.

2. What are the risks?

If you use antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you do need them.

3. How much do they cost?

Antibiotics are usually not expensive if it is a generic brand. But if you take them when you don't need them, they may not work for you in the future and that may cost you a lot of time and money to treat illness.

4. How do I safely take Antibiotics?

If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, take them exactly as directed, even if you feel better quite quickly.

GET SMART AND SAVE MONEY

- Antibiotics are strong medicines, but they don't cure everything
- When not used correctly, antibiotics can actually be harmful to your health
- Antibiotics can cure most bacterial infections. Antibiotics cannot cure viral illnesses
- When you are sick, antibiotics are not always the answer
- Only use antibiotics prescribed by the doctor

Decreasing the inappropriate use of antibiotics is a major strategy for controlling antibiotic resistance. Global action is required to combat this crisis for our public health services; consumer understanding and action are critical to prevent the spread of 'superbugs' that are resistant to antibiotics

How serious is the problem?

The situation is getting worse with the emergence of new bacterial strains resistant to several antibiotics at the same time (known as multidrug-resistant bacteria). Such bacteria may eventually become resistant to all existing antibiotics. Without antibiotics, we could return to the 'pre-antibiotic era', when organ transplants, cancer chemotherapy, intensive care and other medical procedures would no longer be possible. Bacterial diseases would spread and could no longer be treated, causing death.

**Don't Contribute to the Global Health Crisis:
Stop the Misuse of Antibiotics**

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