

ROUTINE ANTIBIOTICS FOR SORE THROAT, ETC.

A treatment at risk of being overused, as indicated by the: Italian College of General Practice and Primary Care

Though a mainstream practice, it is not appropriate to routinely prescribe antibiotics for upper air passage infections, such as strep throat, laryngitis, tonsillitis, sinusitis, ear infections and similar. Upper air passage infections (including ear infections) are mainly of viral origin and heal on their own in a few days. Neither a prolonged rhinitis (that is, a long cold) nor a persistent cough indicate the presence of a bacterial infection. Prescribing antibiotics should only be considered for patients when there is a risk of the infection spreading to the lower air passages (that is, developing bronchitis or pneumonia) or if the clinical picture has worsened after a few days.

Patients at risk of infection in the lower air passage or of other complications, and patients with worsening symptoms, should be re-evaluated after a few days in order to establish whether they could benefit from an antibiotic.

The routine use of antibiotics exposes one to the risk of developing bacterial resistance – making antibiotics less effective – and side effects, particularly related to the intestine. Taking antibiotics when they are not appropriate:

- does not improve or accelerate healing;
- may provoke adverse reactions, diarrhoea being the most common;

➤ provokes antibiotic resistance, or the spreading of bacteria resistant to antibiotics, making these drugs useless and leaving us defenceless against even more severe illnesses.

LET'S UNDERSTAND WHY

Not everybody knows, but antibiotics are not appropriate drugs for every kind of illness. In particular, they are completely useless for illnesses caused by viruses, such as colds and winter flus as well as the majority of



upper respiratory infections.

These medications can provide protection, however, against bacterial infections. From this point of view, antibiotics are indeed extremely efficient weapons.

Like all weapons, though, even antibiotics need to be used with caution. Otherwise, there is a risk of causing the development of bacterial strains that make drugs useless. This is a phenomenon that has particularly developed in the hospitals but that is now starting to spread even outside the hospital environment. For example, after the first five years of penicillin use, 50% of the strains of the Staphylococcus aureus bacteria have become resistant, making the drug inefficient.

WHEN ANTIBIOTICS MAY BE ADVISABLE

The first thing to do is to let the doctor decide whether to prescribe a drug or not, after having evaluated the potential, actual usefulness.

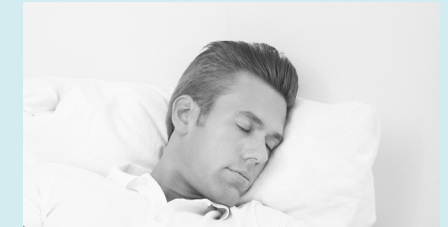
- Avoid pressuring the doctor into prescribing an antibiotic.
- Also avoid self-prescribing, perhaps taking those that have been previously prescribed.
- If prescribed, they should be taken for the indicated period and frequency.

To learn more: "La scienza del sollievo", Test Salute 107, December 2013 (in Italian) available on www.altroconsumo.it in "magazine archive".

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UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS: ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



➤ Give yourself enough rest: the sense of exhaustion caused by viral illnesses allows the body fight infection. It is not advisable to take drugs to combat symptoms to "get right back to shape". Eliminating symptoms does not mean fighting the illness and one risks slowing down healing.

➤ Don't confuse the symptoms with the illness. For example, a cough is a useful symptom that helps the body expel phlegm. If it doesn't cause particular problems (difficulty sleeping, for example), eliminating the cough with a drug that blocks the urge to cough is unnecessary and counter-productive. Even a fever is the body's natural reaction, useful in fighting viruses and bacteria. If it doesn't give excessive discomfort and is not too high, an anti-fever medication is not necessary.

➤ Resort to traditional remedies: drinking a lot helps make the mucus more liquid and therefore makes it easier to expel. Nasal inhalants and washes with physiologic saline solution help fight a blocked nose. A candy or ice cream can alleviate a sore throat.

➤ Humidifying the air in the house during the winter season helps to keep the mucous membranes moist and counteracts irritation.