

# Antibiotics and Seniors



Choosing Wisely NL



Antibiotics are some of the most useful and effective drugs available to doctors and patients to treat bacterial infections.

**But they only work on bacteria.**

**Antibiotics don't have any effect on most colds, flus and coughs, which are caused by viruses.**

When antibiotics are used to treat these illnesses, **it puts us all at risk.**



Whenever you can, you should try to use fewer antibiotics and only take them when your doctor suggests you should. When we use too many antibiotics we:

- Help make **more** drug-resistant bacteria
- Can experience **more** harmful side effects



Doctors, scientists and other professionals are coming together to try to reduce antibiotic overuse in this province. We want to stop prescribing antibiotics for illnesses **where there is no proven benefit** to you. We'll continue prescribing these drugs where they're needed, but if you don't need an antibiotic, you shouldn't be given one.

## Resistant Bugs & Side Effects

Antibiotics are frequently prescribed for seniors with urinary tract and minor lung infections (bronchitis), even though patients who receive drugs for these infections don't get better any faster.

### What happens when we over-prescribe antibiotics?

People who receive antibiotics, even when they **do** need them, can experience:

- rashes
- diarrhea
- other allergic reactions

Overusing antibiotics helps create bacteria that may not be killed by these drugs; each time we use them, we eliminate weaker bacteria, and the ones which can resist the drugs survive to make more resistant bacteria. This is how life-threatening bacteria like **c.difficile** and **MRSA** become stronger against drugs we use to treat them, making it harder to get rid of them.

## Overuse in Newfoundland & Labrador

In 2014, doctors in Newfoundland and Labrador prescribed more antibiotics than doctors in any other province in Canada – a third more often than the province with the second highest use rate. It is critical that we reduce our antibiotic consumption.

### What do we do instead of taking an antibiotic?

Most viral infections will clear up on their own after a few days, but to help you feel better faster we recommend:

- lots of bed rest
- lots of clear fluids, like water or juice
- if you have a fever, try an anti-inflammatory (like acetaminophen or ibuprofen)
- if you have a stuffy nose, try a saline spray or drops
- if you have a sore throat, try gargling with some warm salt water

**If you don't need an antibiotic, why take the risk?**

For more info: talk to your doctor, call the provincial health line (811), or visit

[www.choosingwiselynl.ca](http://www.choosingwiselynl.ca)