

Antibiotics: Miracle Drugs

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The discovery of penicillin in 1928 by Alexander Fleming was one of the greatest scientific achievements of the 20th century. It's hard to imagine a world before the development of what many consider to be miracle drugs; however, just 90 years ago antibiotics weren't available. Thanks to antibiotics some common illnesses, such as strep throat, are now easily treated, whereas in the past, they often led to serious complications.

Antibiotics serve an important role in keeping you and your loved ones healthy. But it's important to remember that antibiotics *only* treat bacterial infections. Most common infections, such as colds, flu, most sore throats, bronchitis, and many sinus and ear infections, are caused by viruses and do not respond to antibiotic treatment. These infections can be overcome by simply treating the symptoms and letting the illness run its course.

Unfortunately, antibiotics have often been over-used, resulting in decreased effectiveness and an increase in antibiotic-resistant diseases. Antibiotic resistance, or the increased ability of bacteria to survive in the presence of antibiotics, has become a major public health threat that we all need to help fight.

When a person takes antibiotics, they are at risk for possibly having a bad reaction to these drugs. Some side effects can be quite serious, or even life-threatening in the case of an allergic reaction or severe diarrhea. This is why it is very important to only use antibiotics when they are absolutely needed and not for viral infections.

Talk to your healthcare professional about the best treatment for your illness. If it is caused by a virus, follow his or her recommendation for treating the symptoms.

Learn more about appropriate antibiotic use and how to feel better when you don't need an antibiotic by visiting CDC's Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work website at cdc.gov/getsmart/community.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.