

# Antibiotics and Infections

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## Types of Infections

It would be nice to have a medicine that makes every little infection go away. In many cases, your child's infection may be treated easily with antibiotics. Unfortunately, not every infection can be treated this way.

There are two main types of infections in children: Viral infections and bacterial infections. Viruses cannot be treated with antibiotics. Bacteria can be treated with antibiotics. So before deciding whether or not antibiotics might work for your child, we have to figure out what sort of infection (viral or bacterial) your child has.

## Viruses

Most infections in children are caused by viruses. Common viral infections include colds, coughs, sore throats, the flu, most cases of vomiting and diarrhea, and many other infections. Like we said, antibiotics do not kill viruses. There is no magic medicine for making viral infections, like colds, go away. We have to rely on the body's natural ability to kill viruses.

Fortunately, most viruses do not cause serious infections, and most colds go away in 7-10 days. Other viral infections may take shorter or longer to go away, depending mostly on the type of virus and the age of the child. This doesn't mean we can't do anything to make the child feel better. While the child's body is fighting the virus, he may have fevers, coughs, chills, or other symptoms. This is a good time to use over-the-counter medicines like Tylenol, Motrin, and cough and cold medicines. However, remember that these medicines do not make the virus go away any faster – they just make your child feel a little better while we wait for the body's natural defenses to get rid of the virus.

## Bacteria

Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. Common bacterial infections include ear infections, strep throat, pneumonia, sinus infections, and skin infections. Many times, bacterial infections get better even if you don't treat them with antibiotics. But by using antibiotics, we can help the body kill bacteria, and help the child feel better much sooner.

We have to be careful, however, when deciding to use an antibiotic for your child's illness. Some antibiotics can have serious side effects. Also, if the wrong antibiotic is used the infection can get worse. Most importantly, if antibiotics are used in your child too often, or for the wrong reasons, it may be much harder to treat bacterial infections in your child in the future.

## In Summary

Although we'd like to be able to wave a magic wand and make your child's cold go away, most of the time we have to depend on the body's natural ability to heal itself. When we diagnose a bacterial infection, rest assured that we'll do everything we can to make it go away quickly and safely.