



ANTIBIOTICS FOR SINUSITIS

THE PROBLEM

People with sinusitis (congestion combined with nasal discharge and facial pain) are often prescribed antibiotics. But most people don't need them. That's because the problem almost always stems from a viral infection, not a bacterial one—and antibiotics don't work against viruses.

THE RISKS

About one in four people who take antibiotics report side effects, such as a rash, dizziness and stomach problems. In rare cases, they can cause severe allergic reactions. Overuse of antibiotics also encourages the growth of bacteria that can't be controlled easily with drugs. That makes you more vulnerable to antibiotic-resistant infections and undermines the usefulness of antibiotics for everyone.

WHEN TO CONSIDER ANTIBIOTICS

Antibiotics should usually only be considered when symptoms last longer than a week, start to improve but then worsen again, or are very severe. Worrisome symptoms that can warrant immediate antibiotic treatment include a fever over 38.6°C, extreme pain and tenderness over your sinuses, or signs of a skin infection, such as a hot, red rash that spreads quickly.

ASK THESE QUESTIONS

Do I really need to have this test, treatment or procedure?

The answer should be direct and simple. Tests should help you and your health professional decide how to treat your problem, and treatments and procedures should help you live a longer, healthier life.

What are the risks (of having or not having it)?

Discuss the risks as well as the chance of inaccurate results or findings that will never cause symptoms, but may require further testing. Weigh the potential complications against possible benefits and the symptoms of the condition itself.

Are there simpler safer options?

Sometimes lifestyle changes will provide all the relief you need.

What happens if I do nothing?

Ask your health professional if your condition might worsen — or get better — if you don't have the test or treatment now.

There may be tests, treatments and procedures you think you need, but you don't. Let's think again. Engage in a healthy conversation with your health professional today.

It's OK to ask questions

If you have questions about your symptoms or the medicines managing your symptoms, speak with your health professional.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Antibiotics: [Health Navigator](#)

Antibiotic resistance: [Health Navigator](#), [Ministry of Health](#)

Adapted from Choosing Wisely Canada (2014), Common tests, treatments and procedures you may think you need. Let's think again.

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