Stephens
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newsletter

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Antibiotics: Sorting Fact from Myth

Myth #1: When you feel a cold coming on, talk to your healthcare provider about a prescription for antibiotics.

The Facts: Colds are not caused by bacteria; they're caused by viruses. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses. If you have a cold, don't plead with your doctor to give you an antibiotic. It won't speed up your recovery. And it might contribute to the worldwide problem of antibiotic resistance.

Myth #2: When your mucus is yellow or green that's a clear sign that you have a bacterial infection. Call your doctor for a prescription for antibiotics.

The Facts: If you've had a bad cold for a couple of days, the green color in the mucus is a sign that your immune system is working hard. The color comes from a protein in your infection-fighting white blood cells. Sip a cup of hot tea and get some rest.

Myth #3: When shopping for soaps and body washes, it's best to buy products labeled "antibacterial." These products don't just keep you clean, they'll reduce your chances of getting sick from bacteria.

The Facts: Not necessarily. Every day, consumers use antibacterial soaps and body washes at home, work or school. Because so many consumers use these products, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) believes that there should be clear benefits to balance any potential risks. In fact, there is no evidence that common antibacterial soaps are any more effective at preventing illness than washing with plain soap and water, say FDA experts. Antibacterial soap products contain chemical ingredients, such as triclosan and triclocarban, which may pose unknown health risks.

Myth #4: When shopping for hand sanitizers, look for brands that claim to prevent MRSA infections.

The Facts: Some hand sanitizers and antiseptic products come with claims that they can prevent MRSA infections. Don't believe them. These statements are unproven, says the FSA. MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a nasty superbug that is resistant to several common antibiotics.

QuickTakes

Antibiotics and Your Health

For more than 75 years, antibiotics have been the first line of defense against bacterial infections. Sadly, some germs have learned to outsmart common antibiotics. This is called antibiotic resistance.

- The improper use of antibiotics is the primary cause of the increase in drug-resistant bacteria.
- The more antibiotics are used, the less effective they become.
- Antibiotic resistance contributes to at least 23,000 deaths and two million illnesses in the United States each year.

Learning more about the proper use of antibiotics can help you and your loved ones make smart decisions when faced with an illness.

Myth #5: As the older antibiotics become less effective, there are newer and better drugs in the pipeline.

The Facts: Research and development of new antibiotics has dwindled in recent years. On average, a drug company spends $5 billion to research and test a new drug. A successful company would rather invest in a new drug that a patient takes for months or years to treat a chronic illness, not a drug to treat a single infection. The FDA has approved only two new antibiotics in the past five years, an 88% drop since the mid-80s. In 2012, the U.S. Congress passed the GAIN Act (Generating Antibiotic Incentives Now) to spur the development of new antibiotics.

Myth #6: Feeding antibiotics to livestock does not affect antibiotic resistance and humans.

The Facts: Not true! More than half of the antibiotics sold in the U.S. are given to food animals for growth and disease prevention. These antibiotics are given to the animals in low doses in their feed and water. This allows the bacteria around the animals to develop antibiotic resistance. These germs may still be present in the meat once it gets to the grocery store. Many stores now offer "no antibiotics added" meats. Look for that label on the package. And remember: always wash your hands when handling any raw meat.

Myth #7: It's a good idea to try to avoid all bacteria.

The Facts: We usually think of bacteria as the germs that cause illness. But not all bacteria are bad. Our bodies are full of both good and bad bacteria. "Probiotics" are helpful bacteria that are found in your body and some foods. Many believe that probiotics help with digestive problems.

PLUM-BERRY YOGURT FROZEN POPS

MAKES 10 POPS

Plums and blueberries make an unusual -- and unusually good -- flavor combination in this refreshing frozen treat. Probiotic-rich yogurt makes the pops nice and creamy.

INGREDIENTS

1 envelope unflavored gelatin
3/4 cup pear, peach or mango nectar
1 1/2 cups diced, peeled ripe red or purple plums 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
16 oz (2 cups) nonfat blueberry yogurt with live cultures

DIRECTIONS

1. Sprinkle gelatin over fruit nectar in a small saucepan. Let stand for 1 minute or until gelatin softens. Cook over very low heat, stirring, until the gelatin dissolves, about 2 minutes.
2. Combine plums, blueberries, yogurt and the gelatin mixture in a blender or food processor and purée until smooth. Spoon the mixture evenly into ten 3-oz paper cups. Cover tops of the cups with aluminum foil and insert a wooden treat stick through the foil into the center of each cup. Freeze until firm, about 3 hours.
3. To serve, remove the foil and peel cups from the pops.

NUTRITIONAL INFO PER POP

65 Calories	14g Carbohydrate
0g Fat	1g Fiber
0g Saturated fat	2g Protein
	24mg Sodium

WILL FREEZING KILL THE PROBIOTICS IN YOGURT?

The freezing process does not kill the probiotics in yogurts with live cultures. In fact, during freezing the cultures go into a dormant state. When eaten and returned to a warm temperature within the body, the cultures become active again, providing all the benefits of cultures in refrigerated yogurt.