Your healthcare team has prescribed antibiotics for you because they think you may have an infection, or another condition which requires antibiotics. Some infections can be treated with antibiotics, which are powerful medications that kill bacteria and can save lives. Like all medications, antibiotics have side effects and should only be used when necessary.

**Will I have side effects from my antibiotic?**

You might. One significant risk of nearly all antibiotics is a severe and sometimes deadly diarrhea caused by a bacteria called *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*). This occurs because antibiotics destroy some of the normal, helpful bacteria in the gut. This allows the *C. difficile* to take over, and puts patients at high risk for this serious infection.

**When should I call my doctor?**

Most diarrhea caused by antibiotics is not infectious and should not cause concern. You should let your healthcare team know right away if you develop watery stool three times or more per day while taking an antibiotic, because that may be a sign of a *C. difficile* infection. Diarrhea caused by *C. difficile* can be serious and must be treated quickly.

The risk of getting *C. difficile* diarrhea is highest during the first month, but it can last for up to three months after you stop taking antibiotics. Let your healthcare team know if you develop diarrhea even after you stop taking an antibiotic.
What are some questions to ask my doctor about antibiotics?

As a patient or caregiver, it is important to understand your or your loved one’s antibiotic treatment. Here are some important questions to ask your healthcare team if you haven’t already been told the answers:

- What infection or condition is this antibiotic treating and how do you know I have that infection or condition?
- What side effects might occur from this antibiotic?
- How long will I need to take this antibiotic?
- Is it safe to take this antibiotic with other medications or supplements (e.g., vitamins) that I am taking?
- Are there any special directions I need to know about taking this antibiotic? For example, should I take it with food?
- How will I be monitored to know whether my infection or condition is responding to the antibiotic?

Remember, antibiotics are life-saving drugs and they need to be used properly. It is important to take your antibiotics exactly as prescribed. If you have any questions about your antibiotics, please talk to your healthcare team.