How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?
Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

For further information:
Ask your doctor, practice nurse or Pharmacist or
Contact BHT Medicines Information on 01494 425355 or
visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk

www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk
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What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. They work by either killing bacteria or preventing their growth. Different types of antibiotics are used to treat different types of infection.

When should antibiotics be used?

Antibiotics are only effective against infections caused by bacteria. They do not work against infections caused by viruses such as common colds, flu, most coughs or sore throats.

Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when you need them. Antibiotics may be lifesaving for infections such as meningitis.

If you are having an operation you may be given antibiotics to prevent an infection. This is known as prophylaxis and they will be given before surgery.

Remember:
Antibiotics won’t work against colds or flu!

Remember: Always complete your course of antibiotics even if you feel better, unless told otherwise by your doctor.

Why can’t other antibiotics be used to treat resistant bacteria?

They can, but they may not be as effective, they may have more side-effects and eventually the bacteria will become resistant to them too.

In recent years fewer new antibiotics have been discovered, so we must look after the antibiotics we have by using them carefully.
Taking other medication

Antibiotics may interfere with other medicines so it is important to tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you take, those prescribed and those bought by yourself, including herbal remedies.

If you are taking warfarin, you should have a blood test for the warfarin (INR check) three to five days after starting the antibiotic. You should inform the person taking the blood test that you are taking an antibiotic.

Resistance to antibiotics

Bacteria change rapidly – they adapt and find ways to survive the effect of antibiotics. They become ‘antibiotic resistant’ so that the antibiotic no longer works.

Antibiotic resistant bacteria are becoming more common. If you take antibiotics when you do not need them, they may lose their ability to kill bacteria. If the bacteria keep ‘over-powering’ the antibiotics we have, we may exhaust ways to treat infections. This is a health hazard not just for the person having taken the antibiotics, but also for anyone else who might catch the resistant bacteria afterwards.

How to take antibiotics

Antibiotics are usually taken by mouth, but can sometimes be given into a vein (intravenous), into a muscle (intra-muscular) or applied to the affected part of the body such as skin, eyes or ears (also known as topical).

Antibiotics are given for a specific period of time and you should be told this information.

It is important to space the doses of antibiotic evenly throughout the day. It is not necessary to wake up to take them during the night. For example, if you need to take one capsule three times a day, take one at 8am, 3pm and 10pm.

Remember:
Always follow the instructions on the label or refer to the medicine patient information leaflet.

Bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics if the course is not completed or the correct dose is not taken. This can result in the infection returning or the antibiotic not working for the same infection in the future.
Do not give your antibiotics to friends, family or pets and do not keep left-over antibiotics. If you have received more doses than needed, hand these into your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

**Remember: Take antibiotics responsibly!**

**Special care**

Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, are breast-feeding or have any liver or kidney problems.

If you have had *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff.) diarrhoea in the past, let your doctor know before taking any antibiotics.

**Possible side-effects**

Refer to the medicine patient information leaflet for all possible side-effects. The most common side-effects with antibiotics are diarrhoea, feeling sick and vomiting.

If diarrhoea is severe or watery, report this to your GP immediately.

After treatment with certain antibiotics, you may get a fungal infection such as thrush. This is because antibiotics can destroy your body's “good”, as well as the “bad” bacteria responsible for the infection being treated.

If you develop an allergic reaction, signs of which include breathlessness, swelling and rash, **stop** taking the antibiotic and seek urgent medical attention.

**Allergies, reactions**

Some people can be allergic to antibiotics, particularly penicillin and similar medicines such as cephalosporins, and may experience swelling of the face and tongue and difficulty breathing when they take these antibiotics. This is called an anaphylactic reaction and it can be serious or even fatal.

Please give clear details of any previous reactions before being prescribed antibiotics. It is important that the most suitable type of antibiotic is given to you for the infection whilst also avoiding any harmful effects.

**Remember: Remind your doctor, nurse or pharmacist of any allergies (including details of allergies, reactions) before you receive any antibiotics.**