How Can You Help?

Everyone can help keep antibiotics effective and keep bacteria from becoming resistant. As a patient, you play a very important role.

Here are ways that you can help fight antibiotic resistance.

- Ask your provider if an antibiotic is really necessary
- Don’t ask for antibiotics when you have an infection caused by a virus (like a cold or the flu).
- Remember, antibiotics do not work on infections caused by viruses.
- Only use antibiotics when your provider prescribes them for you
- Follow your provider’s instructions when taking antibiotics
- Finish the entire course of antibiotics, even if you start to feel better

Here are some things you can do to prevent infection...

- Get the recommended vaccines to prevent infection
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after you sneeze or cough
- Practice good cough etiquette
- Avoid frequent touching of your nose, mouth and eyes
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly and avoid raw eggs and undercooked meats
- Don’t share personal items like toothbrushes and razors
- Practice good health habits; get moderate exercise and plenty of sleep

What You Need to Know About Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs
What is an Antimicrobial Stewardship Program?

We use antibiotics to treat certain kinds of infections. Different types of germs including bacteria and viruses can cause infections. Antibiotics can ONLY treat infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics DO NOT treat infections caused by viruses like the common cold.

If you take antibiotics when they are not needed OR if you do not take them correctly, they may not work against bacteria that they once killed. You may hear this called “antibiotic resistance”. Resistant bacteria can cause infections that may make you sicker. These infections may require you to be admitted to the hospital and stay in the hospital longer. Infections caused by resistant bacteria are harder to cure and may require antibiotics that can cause more harmful side effects.

Your VA providers have developed a program called Antimicrobial Stewardship to improve the use of antibiotics. This program strives to:
- Improve your safety
- Keep bacteria from becoming resistant.

When should you take antibiotics?
- For infections caused by bacteria and not viruses.
- These infections include strep throat, pneumonia and infection in the urine with symptoms.

When should you not take antibiotics?
- If you have an infections caused by viruses.
  - these infections do not require antibiotics.
  - antibiotics do not work on viruses.
- Viruses cause the common cold, the flu and most upper respiratory infections.
- If you use antibiotics for a viral infection, it will not:
  - Cure the infection
  - Make you feel better
  - Keep the virus from spreading to others.

What Does this Mean for Me?

This means that YOU will receive:
- An antibiotic for an infection caused by bacteria (not infections caused by a virus)
- The right antibiotic for your infection
- The right dose of an antibiotic
- An antibiotic at the right time
- An antibiotic for the right length of time

This helps YOU:
- Heal faster from an infection
- Lowers your risk of developing side effects from the antibiotic
- Reduces the likelihood of becoming infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria.