Ah-Choo! You know what comes next – a runny nose, a stuffy head, or fever. You want relief, and you want it now. But think twice before asking your doctor for an antibiotic.

Antibiotics don’t ever cure colds or the flu. Colds and the flu are both caused by viruses, and antibiotics only fight illnesses caused by bacteria. Actually, using an antibiotic unnecessarily can harm you by contributing to a growing health threat called antibiotic resistance. This means some bacteria become resistant to antibiotics. Ultimately, antibiotics may not work for an infection caused by these resistant bacteria.

If you’re sick, you should check with your doctor to determine if you need an antibiotic, but here are some basic guidelines:

**Do You Need an Antibiotic?**
- Colds and flu - No. Viruses cause colds and flu and can’t be cured with antibiotics.
- Sore throats - No, unless you have strep throat, which can be determined by a lab test.
- Cough or bronchitis - Maybe. Most coughs and bronchitis are caused by viruses. However, if the cough lasts a long time, you may have a bacterial infection.
- Ear infections - Maybe. Most ear infections need antibiotics, but some do not.
- Sinus infections - Maybe. Antibiotics can be used for lengthy, severe infections.

**Taking Good Care of Yourself**
Here are some things you can do to feel better if you catch a cold or the flu:
- Get lots of rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Take over-the-counter medications to treat cold or flu symptoms.
- If you’re stuffy or congested, try using a cool mist vaporizer while you sleep.

To help protect you and your family from getting sick, you should:
- Check with your pediatrician to confirm that your children are up to date on their immunizations.
- Get a flu shot.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly (for at least 10 to 15 seconds) to help prevent spreading the illness to others.
- Maintain a balanced diet.

For more information about the proper use of antibiotics, visit www.caqh.org/antibioticsinfo or www.cdc.gov/getsmart.