

'A word of Advice'

If your GP has prescribed antibiotics take them as directed and make sure to finish the course. Antibiotic resistance is much more likely to develop if antibiotics are not taken as directed.

We can reassure you that your GP will prescribe antibiotics when you need them.

By using antibiotics only when you need them they are much more likely to help you.

- Antibiotics are becoming less effective at fighting infections.
- Many infections get better without antibiotics – coughs are a good example of this.
- You can get helpful advice from your community pharmacist.
- If you develop new or worsening symptoms, or if you start to cough up blood, contact your GP.

Developed from initial work by East Lothian LHCC.

Designed by the Social Inclusion & Community Care Directorate of **Lothian NHS Board.**

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Cough
- is an antibiotic
really necessary?

Many infections get better just as quickly without antibiotics – coughs are a good example of this.

We know that many viruses can cause coughs, in these situations antibiotics will not work and will not speed recovery.

Background information

Antibiotics are very important medicines.

Viral infections are much more common than bacterial infections, examples of problems caused by viruses include all colds and flu, most sore throats and many coughs.

Antibiotics help us fight infections caused by bacteria, they don't work at all in those caused by viruses.

We are finding that some bacteria can survive the effects of antibiotics – they become resistant, and antibiotics no longer work against these bacteria. The more we use antibiotics, the more likely it is that bacteria will develop resistance. This

means that antibiotics are becoming less effective at fighting infections. Antibiotics may also cause unpleasant side effects.

We can't stop resistance developing but we can do a lot to slow it down and stop it spreading simply by not using antibiotics when we don't need them. We now know that many infections get better just as quickly without antibiotics. A good example of this is a cough.

What Do We Know?

A cough is not a bad thing! Coughs help defend our lungs by making sure that any secretions don't settle in the lungs where they could cause trouble.

Likewise sputum (or phlegm) acts as a barrier to catch dust and bugs which we breathe in.

Because a cough is part of the body's natural defences it is likely to be the last symptom to clear and, even with treatment, a cough can take up to three weeks to settle.

This is normal and if you are otherwise well should not cause you to be concerned.

For people with recurrent chest problems, or those who are vulnerable to severe chest infections for other reasons, antibiotics can be very useful. Your GP will know your previous medical history and will make a decision to prescribe based on this.

In view of all this, in the Borders we have agreed a policy not to give antibiotics routinely for coughs.

Remember your community pharmacist may be able to give you helpful advice on your symptoms.

We also recommend that smokers stop smoking for the benefit of themselves and others.

