

# Antibiotics

## Overview

Antibiotics treat infections caused by bacteria. They don't help with infections caused by other bugs such as viruses.

Antibiotics are extremely useful, sometimes lifesaving drugs. We need to use them carefully because overuse in the past has meant some bacteria have become hardened to the effect of antibiotics and are now difficult to treat.

Depending on the condition, antibiotics are available as injections, tablets, creams and drops.

**It's very important to use antibiotics correctly so that their life saving properties can be preserved for the people and pets that need them the most.**

## How do they work?

Antibiotics either kill bacteria or prevent them from multiplying.

Bacteria are tiny creatures that live all around us and contrary to popular belief, they aren't always a bad thing, they are essential for life on earth. Bacteria have many important roles such as helping with food digestion in the gut.

Infections develop when bacteria overgrow or get into the wrong place. Infections can make your pet very poorly and in extreme cases, cause death.

There are several different types of antibiotic, each one works in a unique way. Each antibiotic has a particular group of bacteria that they are best at combatting.

## Side effects

- Diarrhoea and / or vomiting.
- Some pets are allergic to certain antibiotics.
- Some antibiotics can cause harm if given to pregnant pets.
- Some antibiotics harm young, growing animals.
- Some antibiotics damage the kidneys or liver, especially in older pets or those with other underlying illnesses.

Your vet will be aware of these side effects and choose the best antibiotic to treat your pet.

## Using antibiotics safely

You have probably heard about 'superbug' bacteria like MRSA. Superbugs are groups of bacteria that have become resistant to antibiotics, they are able to survive despite treatment with antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is very dangerous; it means that people and animals may struggle to fight even simple infections in the future.

The more antibiotics we take and give to our pets, the more resistance we create. We try to reduce these risks by prescribing the right antibiotic for the right length of time and by not giving antibiotics when they aren't needed. You can help to prevent resistance by following this guidance:

- Give the correct dose at the right time.
- Always complete the course (even if your pet seems better).
- Never give antibiotics unless prescribed - the wrong antibiotic to the wrong pet for the wrong condition can cause more harm than good.
- Safely get rid of any antibiotics that are leftover (take them to your vet). Putting them into the bin or down the

toilet means you are releasing them into the environment and creating resistance.

## When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your pet has been prescribed antibiotics and their problem does not seem to be improving or if they have developed side effects.

**You know your pet best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.**

## Does my pet need antibiotics?

Contact your vet for an appointment if you are worried about your pet. If your vet doesn't prescribe antibiotics, there is likely to be a good reason. There are many situations when antibiotics won't cure the problem, for example if your dog has an infection caused by a virus. Speak to your vet – they will be happy to explain further.

Published: Jan 2019