Why am I sick?
Virus or Bacteria?

NEBRASKA HEALTH NETWORK
METHODIST
Nebraska Medicine

When you don't feel well, your top focus is getting better fast. Depending on your illness, an antibiotic may be what you think is necessary to begin the healing process. But, antibiotics aren't always the answer.

As you might think, bacterial infections are caused by bacteria; and viral infections are caused by viruses. Antibiotics are only needed for treating certain infections caused by bacteria and **will not treat or cure viral infections.**

Taking an antibiotic when it's not needed can have many unwanted side effects including diarrhea, nausea, dizziness and yeast infections. Plus, overuse of antibiotics can lead to drug resistant infections or "superbugs." Drug resistance means that the usual antibiotics may not work, which can make it more difficult to treat bacterial infections.

Knowing what is causing your illness is a good first step in understanding whether an antibiotic is right for you.

What could be causing my illness?

Common Condition	Common Cause			Are Antibiotics Needed?
	Bacteria	Bacteria or Virus	Virus	
Common cold/runny nose			✓	No
Sore throat (except strep)			✓	No
Flu			✓	No
Bronchitis/chest cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)*		✓		No*
Middle ear infection		✓		Maybe
Sinus infection		✓		Maybe
Strep throat	✓			Yes
Urinary tract infection	✓			Yes
Whooping cough	✓			Yes

* Studies show that in otherwise healthy children and adults, antibiotics for bronchitis won't help you feel better

What can help me feel better?

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Use saline nasal spray or drops
- Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer
- Use cough drops and sore throat lozenges
- Take acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen to relieve pain or fever**

**Take these medications only if directed by your health-care provider.