Why you should only take an antibiotic if it is really necessary...

Please don’t always expect a doctor to prescribe an antibiotic for you if you think your COPD has got worse. There are many different reasons for this and antibiotics may not always be the answer.

Doctors are not keen to give antibiotics unless there is a real need. There are two reasons for this. Firstly using antibiotics too much, or when they are not needed, encourages bacteria to become resistant. This means the antibiotic will no longer be effective against the bacteria. Secondly antibiotics themselves can cause side effects such as diarrhoea, skin rashes and stomach upsets.

If you require this information in large print, audio or another language please call the free healthline 0500 20 20 30

If you need this, or any other NHS Grampian publication in an alternative format (large print, audio tape etc) or in another language please contact Corporate Communications. (t) 01224 554400 (e) grampian@nhs.net Please ask for publication CGD 070463.
What is COPD?

COPD stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. It occurs in people whose lungs have been damaged, generally due to cigarette smoking, but there are also other causes.

The most common symptoms are:

- Cough – often associated with phlegm.
- Breathlessness.
- Wheezing – noisy breathing due to narrowing of the airways.

but not everyone has all of these.

How do I know when my COPD has got worse?

If you have a sudden worsening of your COPD you may experience some of:

- Increased breathlessness.
- Increased volume of sputum.
- A change in the colour of your sputum from white or clear to green or yellow.
- You may also feel hot, sweaty, weak and tired.

What can you do to help?

If you are a smoker the most important thing you can do is to stop smoking. There are now effective ways of helping people who want to stop smoking - please ask your pharmacist, GP or contact the Smoking Advice Service on 0500 600 332.

Your doctor will have given you medicines to take to help your COPD. These are normally delivered by an inhaler.

Make sure you know how to use your inhaler and ask your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist if you are not sure.

Remember to take your inhaler regularly at all times, and order repeat supplies of your prescription in good time.

Do all you can to eat well and keep fit. Build up exercising gradually to prevent unnecessary breathlessness. Begin slowly by doing gentle arm and leg movements, then set targets to increase the distance you walk.

- Keep a sputum container at home (collected previously from your doctor’s surgery).
- Maintain your weight at a sensible level and eat healthily.
- Have a flu vaccination every year.
- Avoid people with coughs and colds if possible.
- Make sure you have received a pneumococcal vaccination (you only need this once).

Should you contact your doctor?

Contact your doctor if you notice any sudden sustained worsening of your condition such as:

- Increased breathlessness, cough.
- Increased sputum.
- Sputum colour becomes dark green.

Take a fresh (same day) sample of sputum with you to your doctor in your sputum container.

Your doctor will only consider giving an antibiotic if your sputum is deep green / brown. He may send a specimen to the laboratory first to check for germs.

You should:

- Adjust your dose of bronchodilator in line with your doctor’s instructions.
- Start to take an antibiotic or oral corticosteroid if you have supplies of these at home and your doctor has left you precise instructions.