

# Antibiotic use needs to be monitored

Antibiotics have been prescribed for the prevention and treatment of bacterial infections since the 1940s, but due to overuse, they need to be carefully monitored by the healthcare sector. Failure to do so could result in further escalation of a major global problem.

This is according to Dr Pieta Serfontein, medical executive at Cipla, who states that antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health. “Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in response to the use of the medicine and then develops in a way to defend itself against the antibiotics.”



He explains that while the resistance can occur naturally, the misuse of antibiotics in humans are accelerating the process. “It is also important to note that the bacteria itself becomes resistant – not the human. This resistance to antibiotics could lead to increased medical expenses, prolonged hospitalisation and higher mortality rates.”

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), antibiotic resistance is rising to higher levels in all parts of the world. “When a bacterial infection cannot be treated by first-line antibiotics, due to the development of antibiotic resistance in the patient, more expensive medicine must be used,” he says.

The WHO recommends that people assist in the fight against antibiotic resistance by:

- Only use antibiotics when prescribed by a certified health care professional

- Never demand antibiotics if your health care professional says you do not need them
- Always follow your health care professional's advice when using antibiotics
- Never share or use leftover antibiotics
- Prevent infections by regularly washing hands, preparing food hygienically, avoiding close contact with sick people, practising safer sex and keeping vaccinations up to date

In addition, Serfontein says that it is important that people understand the link between probiotics and antibiotics.

“Antibiotics effectively prevent bacterial cells from multiplying - giving the immune system a chance to regain control. The secret to their success is their ability to target bacterial cells and leave the host cells unharmed.[i] Unfortunately, antibiotics are not able to differentiate between good and bad bacteria and destroy not only the harmful pathogens but also the beneficial bacteria in the gut.”

“This can lead to a reduction of good bacteria in the gut, causing diarrhoea, constipation or vaginal thrush, he says. To restore the balance, these bacteria must be replaced but the modern day life does unfortunately not allow adequate exposure to replace intestinal flora. As a result, many people choose to supplement their diet with a probiotic to counteract the negative side-effects of antibiotics.”

“In light of the awareness week, it is vital that all South Africans are educated about the correct use of antibiotics, which should only be used as prescribed by a health care professional. When taking antibiotics it is also beneficial to consider taking a probiotic that will target both the small and large intestines,” concludes SerfonteinSerfontein.

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