

## ANTIBIOTIC-ASSOCIATED DIARRHEA PATIENT INFORMATION

**If you have received antibiotics while in hospital, or have been prescribed antibiotics that you are to take following discharge from hospital, please review this information sheet on antibiotic-associated diarrhea. If you have any questions, ask your nurse, doctor, or pharmacist.**

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Antibiotics can cause diarrhea in up to one third of people who take them. Most often, the diarrhea is mild. Sometimes, a more serious type of diarrhea associated with taking antibiotics is caused by the *Clostridium difficile* bacterium.

### **Why can diarrhea occur with antibiotics?**

Bacteria are normally present in your bowel. Diarrhea can occur because antibiotics kill some of the bacteria that usually live in your bowel. This upsets the normal balance. Sometimes harmful bacteria such as *Clostridium difficile*, if present in your bowel, can overgrow leading to diarrhea and other symptoms. The risk of *Clostridium difficile* is higher if you have been in the hospital.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Diarrhea from antibiotics is usually mild, consisting of loose and/or frequent bowel movements. Symptoms of *Clostridium difficile* diarrhea may be more severe and may include:

- Watery diarrhea that may contain mucus and/or blood
- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fever
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### **What should you do if you get diarrhea?**

If you are taking an antibiotic and have mild diarrhea that is not bothersome and you are able to eat and drink without difficulty, continue to take the antibiotic as prescribed. The diarrhea should go away after the antibiotic is finished.

**CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF you have any of the following symptoms:**

- **Diarrhea which is bothersome or severe, or which is bloody**
- **Abdominal pain**
- **Fever**
- **Diarrhea which continues after the antibiotic is finished**
- **Diarrhea which starts after you have finished taking the antibiotic(s).**

**Remind your doctor that you have recently been on antibiotics.**

**DO NOT** take anti-diarrhea medications that you can buy without a prescription (example Imodium or Kaopectate) without first checking with your doctor. These may cause a more serious health condition.

### **How can you take care of yourself?**

- Follow your doctor's advice regarding rest, activity, medication and diet.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the washroom and before eating or preparing food..
- If your doctor prescribes a new antibiotic for your diarrhea, take all of the medicine as prescribed.
- Be sure that you drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.