

Script – Print – Do you really need that antibiotic?

During those times of the year when we're feeling down and out, we hope a prescription from the doctor might do the trick to get us back on our feet.

But that's not always the case, especially when it comes to antibiotic resistance, says Michelle Brady, dean of Graduate Affairs and Research for Saint Anthony College of Nursing in Rockford, one of two colleges of nursing owned and supported by OSF HealthCare.

"Antibiotic resistance is when bacteria no longer respond to the medications or antibiotics that we give you to treat an infection," says Brady. "It's a change in the bacteria, not a change in us. It's a fairly large problem worldwide. There are 1.27 million deaths attributed to antibiotic resistance in the world, so I think that's a pretty significant number."

The problems with antibiotic resistance include risk of longer illness or death, severe medication side effects, additional medical appointments and extended hospital stays.

One of the biggest issues is overuse of antibiotics. For example, you wouldn't take antibiotics for a sore throat, which is a viral and not a bacterial illness.

Another problem is the misuse of antibiotics. If you forget to take one or more doses of your antibiotic or stop using the medicine too soon, bacteria can start to multiply, and mutated bacteria can quickly become resistant to medicine.

Antibiotic-resistant infections can affect anyone. There are, however, certain groups who face a higher risk of developing a problem including babies, people older than age 65, people with compromised immune systems and people who regularly use antibiotics.

Alissa Bartel is a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare. She says when people don't feel well, obviously they want something to help them. She adds it's important for providers to be well-educated and prepared to talk to patients about why antibiotics aren't always good for them, why they don't always treat the problem and possible alternatives.

"You really have to talk to patients at a level they can understand instead of using a bunch of jargon that can leave them frustrated," says Bartel. "I make sure they know exactly what they're getting, what I recommend, what our follow-up plan would be and answer any questions they have."

Health care organizations work with their providers to follow clinical guidelines related to infections. In addition, there are resources available to providers, so they know what common organisms are in the community and how those organisms respond to medications.

"In the last three to five years we have put more emphasis on health and wellness than we used to – good exercise, good sleep, good nutrition – all help you maintain a healthier, robust immune system," Brady says. "I think we've done a really good job of making sure that each provider understands they have ownership in this and that starts with prescribing appropriately.

"But also taking the time to educate your patients as to why they think they need that antibiotic. Give them alternatives as to what they can do to feel better. It's more than just giving them a prescription. It's listening to them and listening to what their concerns are and helping them find a solution that may not be a prescription antibiotic."

As winter approaches, physician offices are seeing more people experiencing respiratory infections, colds, flu, RSV and COVID symptoms. Unfortunately, antibiotics will not help treat those viral infections.

That's why Bartel encourages patients to remember good hand hygiene, keep your hands away from your face and mouth and practice self-care to reduce your level of stress. It's also important to stay up to date on vaccines for flu, COVID and RSV if you qualify.

"If your body is stressed and your chronic conditions are not well cared for, you are at greater risk of developing any of these infections, which can turn serious very quickly," she says. "So stay up to date on your visits with your primary care provider, ask them questions and try to stay as healthy as possible to prevent illness without using antibiotics."

To learn more about ways to prevent antibiotic resistance, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).