



September 29th, 2014

Antibiotics Updates

Antibiotic Resistance

The World Health Organization has published a report pointing out growing problems with antibiotic resistance. It occurs when bacteria mutate and become “immune” to antibiotics and it is caused, in part, by misuse and overuse of antibiotics. Reductions in antibiotic use can be achieved through better diagnostic measures, improved infection control, hygiene, cleaner water, and vaccination.

A good example of a class of antibiotics with growing resistance is the macrolides, especially azithromycin. It has, in the past, been overused to treat ear and respiratory infections in children – most of whom are only experiencing a viral illness that will not respond to antibiotics. Resistance is estimated at 30 percent and the concern is that the antibiotic won't be effective for those who really need it, such as people with penicillin allergy.

Penicillin Allergy Test

Many people inaccurately think they have a penicillin allergy. A study from California has quantified this: 19 out of 20 patients with a reported penicillin allergy actually don't have one! There are costs associated with this misreported penicillin allergy. These patients are subjected to second choice antibiotics – often at greater cost and more side effects – and it can contribute to furthering antibiotic resistance. Talk to your doctor about testing to confirm whether you actually have a penicillin allergy.

Prevent Foodborne Illness

Despite significant outbreaks of foodborne illness in the last decade and measures to reduce the occurrence, food-related illness remains a significant problem. A recent food safety report card released by the CDC has found a small decrease in cases of Salmonella over the last 3 years, while the incidence of conditions such as Campylobacter, Vibrio and E coli have increased slightly – although all are better than the 1990s. We must remain vigilant!

Antibiotics have been described as one of the greatest health advents of the last century and have probably been largely responsible for improvements in our life span – but they are a tool we will lose if we don't use them judiciously! Your pharmacist can help you correctly take your prescribed antibiotics.