

Antibiotics for acute bronchitis

The numbers below refer to patients who had a persistent cough with or without mucus or phlegm (productive cough) or a cough with persistent symptoms resembling a cold. Patients were prescribed either an antibiotic treatment or a placebo (e.g., a sugar pill or no treatment) and received a follow-up examination 2 to 14 days after treatment.

	100 people who took a placebo or had no treatment	100 people who took antibiotics
Benefits		
How many patients suffered from a cough?*	51	32
How many patients were considered to have an improved health status?	about 67 in each group	
How many days did the patients feel sick?	5 ½ days	5 days
Harms		
How many patients experienced adverse events (e.g. nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea)?	19	23
In general, how does the use of antibiotics affect the treatment of future bacterial infections?	If antibiotics are used too frequently, bacteria that are insensitive to antibiotics can develop and spread. This is known as antibiotic resistance. People who are infected with resistant bacteria are then difficult to treat as the effectiveness of antibiotics is reduced.	

*There was no difference between both treatments in the number of people who had a productive cough.

Short summary: People who took antibiotics were less likely to have a cough but reported feeling sick for a similar number of days and reported a similar health status to that of those who did not take antibiotics. Adverse effects occurred more often when antibiotics were taken. Excessive use of antibiotics carries the risk of bacteria becoming resistant to antibiotics.

Sources: [1] Smith et al. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2017(6):CD000245. [2] BMG. The most important terms about antibiotic resistance 2019.