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MAKE HOLIDAYS BRIGHTER

Meet some community members who could use a little help this Christmas.
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HEALTH & FITNESS

CHOOSE ANTIBIOTICS WISELY

Antibiotics aren't always the best choice for illnesses in children and adults



Go zany for Zagnut coconut wafers

By Alison Ladman
Associated Press

Zagnut candy bars are like a crumbly, coconutty Butterfinger, minus the chocolate. These cookies play off that crisp coconut texture, combining both coconut flour (often found with the gluten-free products) and shredded unsweetened coconut. You also can make your own coconut flour by pulsing unsweetened shredded coconut in a food processor until finely ground.

HAVE YOU GOT THE BEST HOLIDAY COOKIE IN TOWN? WE WANT TO TASTE IT!

From 5-7 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 9, bring a batch of your cookies, along with your recipe, to the Tallahassee Democrat lobby to enter them into our annual Cookie of the Year Contest. Our sports reporters will be the judges this year, and they love cookies.

They'll choose their favorite cookies, and we'll publish the recipe for one each day on the cover of TLH Local starting on Dec. 14 for "12 Days of Cookies." Finally, on Christmas Day, watch for a very special recipe as we unveil the Cookie of the Year. The winner, as in years past, will receive a trophy and will be featured in the newspaper and on Tallahassee.com.

You can also send us the recipes for your favorite holiday cookies, and we'll add them to our online cookie database. Visit Tallahassee.com/TLHTaste to submit your recipe and photo and to search other locally contributed cookie recipes.



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For many people, antibiotics are one of the miracles of modern medicine. Before World War II, infections were one of the top three causes of death. When penicillin and sulfa were released, people were amazed.



Ken Brummel-Smith, MD
TLH blogger

However, in the decades since, the picture has become much more clouded. "Super bugs," like methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), "flesh eating bacteria" (multiple different strains) and "C. Diff colitis" (a toxin produced by bacteria in the gut) now receive front-page media coverage.

Experts agree that one of the reasons for the rise in the number of bacteria that are resistant to so many antibiotics is the unnecessary use of these powerful drugs. Doctors often think that the patient needs a prescription to feel they've gotten "their money's worth" and patients often ask directly for a prescription.

This is where Choosing Wisely comes in. This movement, started by the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation and now adopted by over 60 different medical societies, is trying to get doctors not to do certain things, and patients not to ask for them. Each medical society produces a list of five tests

and treatments that should not be done. Some societies, like the American Academy of Family Physicians, have produced three lists. And many societies have picked antibiotics.

So here are some recommendations from the nation's medical specialists regarding antibiotics you should not use:

- » Don't use antibiotics for a mild or moderately severe sinus infection unless it lasts longer than seven days. Research has shown that most sinus infections are caused by viruses (which are not killed by antibiotics) and will usually heal on their own within a week. Very high fevers or long lasting infections should be treated. But the best thing to do is rest, drink lots of fluids, rinse your nose with salt water and gargle. Savings: up to

\$5.8 billion a year.

- » Don't routinely use antibiotics for ear infections in children from 2 years to 12 years old. It's best to watch the child closely for two to three days to see if it resolves on its own. Drinking lots of fluids and using mild medicines for pain and fever will help. If high fever (greater than 102.2) or severe pain develops, treatment may be needed. Children with an immune deficiency and those under 2 should always see a doctor when they have fever.

- » Antibiotics should not be used for viral infections, like sore throat and bronchitis in children. Since antibiotics will not kill the virus, it only increases the chance of growing antibiotic-resistant bugs.

Better to get some sleep, rest, drink lots of fluids and

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Free hearing aids for patients with BC/BS Federal Employees Program (FEP).

Choose

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humidify the air breathed – and wait it out. Antibiotics do not shorten the time the child is sick. The same advice is probably valid for adults, though it hasn't been the subject of a Choosing Wisely list yet.

» Don't use antibiotics for "pink eye." Pink eye (conjunctivitis) is almost always a virus infection. Antibiotics don't touch it, and it will kill of the good bacteria we have in our system — which actually prevents infections. Also, the eye is very sensitive to allergic reactions.

» Don't use antibiotics to treat an abnormal

urine test when there are no urinary tract symptoms. Many older people have some bacteria in their urine. But if they don't have symptoms – like burning, an increase in trips to the bathroom or a new onset of incontinence, treatment makes no difference and increases the rate of resistant bugs developing. The same advice applies to children.

» Don't use topical antibiotics on minor skin wounds. The best treatment for a skin wound is a lot of washing with plain water. If there are no signs of infection (redness, pus, swelling, warmth), antibiotics will not help prevent infections.

Another related issue is about so-called "penicillin allergy." Although 10 percent of the people

say they have an allergy to penicillin, studies have shown that up to 90 percent of them are not actually allergic. They most likely had a different kind of reaction, such as an upset stomach, rather than a true allergic reaction. A true allergic reaction involves red welts on the skin (hives), asthma, puffy, red eyes, nasal congestion and itching. Some people have rashes that are not actually allergic reactions. If you think you have a penicillin allergy, talk to your doctor about it. Penicillin is still a great antibiotic and you wouldn't want to avoid using it unless it's absolutely necessary.

You can check out all the lists at www.choosingwisely.org or at the Consumer Reports col-

laborative project at consumerhealthchoices.org/campaigns/choosing-wisely.

The best approach is to be an informed patient. Don't be afraid to talk with your doctor about any recommendation and ask directly about the benefits and harms of any treatment or test. It is only through shared decision-making that the best medical decisions can be made.

Note: These reflections are based upon my review of the scientific literature and 35 years of medical experience. They do not necessarily reflect the views of FSU College of Medicine.

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