Diarrhoea after antibiotics



YOUR HEALTH

DR GITA MATHAI

Q After a course of antibiotics, I developed bloating, stomach pain and diarrhoea. What should I do?

Antibiotics can disturb the balance of beneficial bacteria in your intestines, causing these symptoms. Plain curd containing live cultures may be included in your diet if you tolerate it, but it is not a guaranteed treatment. Probiotic sachets or capsules may help some people, although their benefits vary. Drink plenty of fluids and oral rehydration solution to replace fluid lost through diarrhoea. Contact your doctor if you have frequent watery stools, fever, blood in the stools, worsening abdominal pain or signs of dehydration. Diarrhoea after antibiotics can sometimes indicate *Clostridioides difficile* infection, which needs treatment.



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Coffee and cholesterol

Q I have read that drinking coffee raises blood cholesterol levels. Is this true?

The effect of coffee on cholesterol depends largely on how it is prepared. It contains cafestol and kahweol, natural compounds that can raise LDL or bad cholesterol. These are present in higher amounts in unfiltered coffee, such as boiled, Turkish and French-press coffee. Espresso contains smaller amounts while paper-filtered and instant coffee contain very little. Traditional South Indian coffee prepared using a metal filter is not equivalent to paper-filtered coffee.

For most healthy adults, up to 400 mg of caffeine daily is generally considered safe, although the amount per cup varies widely. No clear rule says drinking more than four cups automatically increases heart disease risk. If your cholesterol is elevated, choose paper-filtered or instant coffee.

Pneumococcal vaccine

Q I read that pneumococcal bacteria can cause severe pneumonia. Do I need the vaccine?

Pneumococcal vaccination begins in infancy; doses are given at around two, four and six months, followed by a booster at 12-15 months. Children who miss doses should receive age-appropriate catch-up vaccination.

Childhood vaccination does not remove the need for vaccination in adulthood as immunity can wane. Adults aged 19-49 with chronic illnesses such as heart, lung or kidney disease, diabetes or a weakened immune system, may need pneumococcal vaccination. Others should get it at age 50, rather than the earlier threshold of 65.

Breathing exercises

Q I am asthmatic and have to use maintenance inhalers. Do I need to do breathing exercises?

Regular breathing exercises may help ease breathlessness, promote relaxation and improve quality of life. Techniques include pursed-lip breathing, diaphragmatic breathing and gentle yoga breathing exercises. However, in asthma, they have not been shown to reduce flare-ups. These exercises complement prescribed treatment; they must not replace regular medication or reliever inhalers.

Puffy eyelids

Q Both my eyelids are puffy. What should I do?

Puffy eyelids may result from allergies, fluid retention, inadequate sleep or age-related changes. A doctor should assess persistent swelling and may recommend tests for thyroid, kidney or liver problems. For mild puffiness, try gently applying a clean, cool compress to closed eyelids for five minutes each morning. Reducing salt intake and getting adequate sleep may also help. Seek medical attention if the swelling is accompanied by pain, redness, fever or changes in vision.

Itchy ears

Q My ears itch constantly, sometimes waking me at night. What can I do?

Avoid inserting cotton buds or other foreign objects into your ears. These can injure the ear. Eczema, an allergic reaction, earwax build-up, or a fungal or bacterial infection may cause persistent itching. Have an ENT specialist examine your ears.

The writer has a family practice at Vellore and is the author of *Staying Healthy in Modern India.* **If you have questions on health issues, write to** *yourhealthgm@yahoo.co.in*