

When I first started writing this column, I wondered if I would ever run out of material. Well, I don't think that will happen. It seems everyday I am reminded of how much misinformation and misunderstanding there is about health issues. In this country, health care providers are doing a poor job of educating their patients.

My most recent example involves a patient of mine who told me that she has been having problems with fluid buildup in one of her ears. She has been prescribed four rounds of antibiotics with no improvement in her condition. There are two issues here that need to be addressed.

First, antibiotics kill bacteria. They don't kill viruses. Most fluid buildup in the ear is not caused by a bacterial infection, so antibiotics are usually not effective in helping fluid in the ears. Some people notice that their ears clear up after being on antibiotics, but in reality they would have cleared up had they taken nothing. Just because the ears improved while on the antibiotics, doesn't mean the antibiotics were responsible.

Bacterial infections of the ear are usually painful and the ear drum is red and swollen. When these conditions are not present, most likely the problem is not caused by bacteria and antibiotics will not help. In this patient's case there was no evidence that there was a bacterial infection and she was still prescribed four rounds of antibiotics. After she finished with the fourth round and she still had the problem, she went back to her doctor and was told that they didn't know what was wrong with her, yet they gave her another prescription for antibiotics.

This brings us to the second issue that I want to discuss. Why do doctors prescribe antibiotics when it is not likely the antibiotics will help? Probably because it is commonly believed that they will do no harm, so what could it hurt?

Even though it is widely known that unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions can have serious consequences, they are still over prescribed. Antibiotics can cause deadly allergic reactions. They have been shown to increase the incidence of asthma in children. They lead to the development of super germs. They kill the good bacteria that are supposed to be in and on the body and that opens the door for bad bacteria and yeasts to over-populate and cause all kinds of health problems.

Antibiotics can destroy mitochondria. Mitochondria are the energy producers in the body. They are built much like bacteria and have been shown to be damaged by antibiotics. If the body's energy generators are damaged, the metabolism goes down and body fat increases.

Antibiotics are important tools and they are absolutely appropriate in certain circumstances, but in this country they are prescribed much too often. Next time you receive an antibiotic prescription, you might want to ask your health care provider if he or she is certain there is a bacterial infection present and whether it is unlikely that the body will clear it up on its own. If your body has trouble healing infections on its own, you have a larger problem than lack of antibiotics and need to also look at improving your immune competence. For information about this, feel free to contact me at my office or visiting our website at lifetouchclinics.com.