

OVER ANTIBIOTIC-ED?

In the last 517 Magazine submission, I addressed “Is There Wisdom in Wisdom Teeth Removal for Your Teen.” I referenced that, in my mind, the most significant side effects are not from the surgery itself but the consequences of prescribing “prophylactic” (preventive) antibiotics.

Because we haven’t developed room enough to accommodate wisdom tooth eruption, we often end up with teeth that are “impacted,” meaning embedded in the gums and/or bone. Still, in the hands of a skilled oral surgeon there are very few post-op complications. For most of us, our bodies heal well, despite what we do to insult it.

Putting a youngster on antibiotic prior to the extractions, even when there is no sign of infection, seems like the definition of “overkill” to me. You see, antibiotics don’t just kill potentially harmful bacteria but all the good, protective gut bacteria along the way.

Unfortunately, the GI system doesn’t bounce right back after the prescribed course of antibiotics are completed. In truth, it might take months. People don’t tend to talk about gut discomfort or the changed consistency of their poops – but that is indicative of disruption in the gut-bug diversity, a shift in the microbiome. In the worst-case scenario, we can develop a potentially deadly infection called C. Diff. More commonly, we can cause permanent extinction of entire families of gut bugs. In today’s world, our gut bug diversity is about half of what our ancestors had, and this depletion is wreaking havoc with our entire immune systems.

Overuse of antibiotics in today’s world is also cascading us into some very dangerous population side effects. First, antibiotics are losing their punch as the antibiotic-resistant genes in the bacteria themselves are becoming more widespread. Have you heard the term superbugs? They’re REAL. These are robust antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria like MRSA, VRE and MDR TB.

This is clearly in response to our massive use of antibiotics. They are not only over-prescribed for people but even more prevalently fed to livestock for purposes of fattening them up. In today’s world, specific antibiotic resistance is now arising within a year or two, often making our newly introduced antibiotics ineffective within three to five years.



As a response, most pharmaceutical companies have reduced their budgets for developing and introducing new antibiotics. That’s scary. With fewer antibiotics on the market and antibiotic-resistant bugs on the rise, we are predicted to face the population death rates from bacterial infections that my grandparents did. In fact, the World Health Organization considers antimicrobial resistance a serious threat that is no longer just a prediction.

Embarrassingly, my own (dental) profession is lagging in its response to the antibiotic crisis. A large 2018 look-back study revealed that from 1996 to 2013, physician prescribing declined 18.2%. Now that’s progress! Unfortunately, dental professional’s prescribing increased 62.2% during that same time. And dentistry’s proportionate contribution increased from 6.7% to 11.3% of all antibiotic prescriptions. Among the handful of plausible reasons listed in the publication were unwarranted preventive antibiotics for extraction of wisdom teeth.

With this in mind, your kids need you. Brave Parents advocate for no antibiotic prescriptions unless there is a known pre-existing infection. By the way, this rule not only applies for dentistry but all of medicine. The most healthful, Brave Parents never push their docs for antibiotics – saving this important arsenal for when there is a real bacterial war to rage.



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