Antibiotics a Prescription for Trouble

**This Type of Meat Contains a "Harmless" Ingredient Which Boosts Your Odds of Disease**

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By Dr. Mercola

Few would deny that you simply cannot achieve health without a well-functioning immune system.

Your immune defenses are key in protecting you from all disease, including cancer, toxic poisons, infections, inflammation, and even aging.

Many do not realize that an important part of your immune system actually begins in your gut — long before your blood or bone marrow become involved. In fact, 80 percent of your immune system lies in your gastrointestinal tract, which houses 100 trillion bacteria—about two to three pounds worth of bacteria!

So the expression, “He’s got a lot of guts” has some literal truth to it.

The army of bacteria that occupy the nooks and crannies of your intestine are the “DEFCON 1” of your defense system. There is even evidence that [your appendix](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2008/07/08/helpful-bacteria-may-be-hiding-in-your-appendix.aspx) serves as a virtual military barracks for these critical defenses.

You should have about 85 percent “good” bacteria and 15 percent “bad”, but unfortunately, most people are upside down with that ratio. For this reason, I always recommend a diet rich in cultured or fermented foods, as well as a [good quality probiotic supplement](http://probiotics.mercola.com/probiotics.html) to restore your ratio to a healthful balance.

Probiotics have been shown to:

* Modulate your immune response and reduce inflammation
* Digest and absorb certain carbohydrates
* Produce vitamins, absorb minerals, and eliminate toxins
* Prevent allergic reactions
* Keep bad bacteria in check

Another major task of probiotics is to help restore your immune system after it has been damaged by antibiotics.

## Antibiotics: A Prescription for Trouble

Under the right circumstances, antibiotics are very effective and necessary. That said, I believe they are vastly overused.

About 95 percent of the time, antibiotic prescriptions are totally unnecessary, and can be harmful.

According to [Doug Kaufmann](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2003/06/18/antibiotics-bacteria.aspx), author of The Fungus Link:

“Simply put, antibiotics are poisons that are used to kill ... I contend that poisons that kill small organisms in small doses—organism-specific varieties notwithstanding — can also kill big organisms, when they are taken in big doses. You, my friend, are a big organism.

Every time you swallow antibiotics, you kill beneficial bacteria in your intestines, upsetting the delicate balance of your intestinal terrain. This can lead to a syndrome called “Leaky Gut Syndrome” whereby your intestinal wall is damaged, interfering with how your body absorbs nutrients and filters out waste and toxins.

[Leaky Gut Syndrome](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2006/12/14/insulin-dependent-diabetes-and-rheumatoid-arthritis-improved-by-food-choices.aspx) can lead to a whole host of illnesses.

However, taking the antibiotics your physician prescribes is not the ONLY way you are getting them. Antibiotics may be the mystery ingredient in your Chicken Kiev and a common and typically vastly underappreciated way in which you can be exposed to them..

## Most Antibiotics in the US Used for Farm Animals

As much as 70 percent of all antibiotics sold in the U. S. are fed to chickens, cattle and hogs — not to treat disease but to make them grow faster. This increases profit margins for livestock producers, but it puts YOUR health at risk.

Animals are fed low doses of antibiotics, killing off some of the animals’ bacteria. Meanwhile, the stronger, more resistant bacteria survive, multiply, and pass on their strength and resistance to future generations.

A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that [70 percent of antibiotics used in this country are given to animals for growth promotion and other non-medical uses.](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2001/09/19/antibiotics-hamburgers.aspx) This negligent practice is largely responsible for the potent strains of antibiotic resistant bacteria we are seeing today.

According to a [2009 University of Iowa study](http://www.news-releases.uiowa.edu/2009/january/012309mrsa_study.html), 70 percent of hogs and 64 percent of workers in industrial animal confinements tested positive for the antibiotic resistant strain of MRSA. The study pointed out that, once MRSA is introduced, it could spread broadly to other swine and their caretakers, as well as to their families and friends.

Not only are antibiotics embedded in your meats, but [they have made their way into your produce](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2007/07/13/are-there-antibiotics-in-your-lettuce.aspx) as well.

Antibiotics are being transferred, via the manure used as fertilizer, into your corn, lettuce, potatoes, and other crops.

Eating organically may not entirely alleviate this problem, since organic crops, which cannot be fertilized with synthetic fertilizers, are the ones most often fertilized with manure.

As it stands, manure that contains antibiotics is still allowed under the organic label. So it all depends on where the organic farmer gets his manure from. Some organic crop farmers may be getting their manure from organic cattle farms, but there’s no guarantee that’s taking place.

The only way to find out is to ask the farmer first-hand. Taking all of these factors into consideration, is it any wonder that the ratio of good-bacteria-to-bad is upside down in most people in our society?

## Government Agencies Finally Taking a Stand — Sort of ...

The rise of antibiotic-resistance in livestock is so alarming that government officials have finally admitted you can become infected when you eat or simply handle infected meat. In a remarkable move by the current administration, [the FDA is proposing to phase out antibiotics used to promote animals’ growth.](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20100801/BUSINESS01/8010346/Livestock-drugs-threaten-human-health-FDA-says)

They also warn that the microbes can contaminate kitchen counters, utensils and other food.

Even the USDA, which usually defends agribusiness interests, proclaimed at a congressional hearing that there is indeed a link between antibiotic use in animals and drug resistance in humans.

But the FDA hasn’t gone far enough.

[The FDA has “recommended” that producers limit use of these drugs to medically necessary instances](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/06/28/health/main6626710.shtml), under the guidance of a veterinarian, but they haven’t issued stricter regulations.

Do you really want to rely on “the honor system” with regard to how industry grows your food?

Do you really think industrial lobbyists are going to take the high road here?

Unlikely!

We need to implement measures to ensure antibiotics are used responsibly — and that needs to go beyond mere suggestion. An overhaul of regulation is in order.

This sort of revamping is not unprecedented — Denmark did it in1998.

## The Danish Experiment: A Success Story about Antibiotic-Free Farming

Denmark took the bull by the horns in a bold maneuver that 17,000 Danish farmers proudly call the “[Danish Experiment.](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/10/eveningnews/main6195054.shtml)”

In 1998, after European studies showed a link between antibiotic-fed livestock and antibiotic-resistant infections in humans, Denmark launched a ban on the use of routine antibiotics in farming. Antibiotics were reserved for animals that were actually sick.

Since the ban, the Danish pork industry has grown by 43 percent, making them one of the top pork exporters in the world.

The rest of Europe followed suit in 2006.

But, not so with the American Pork Industry, which was spooked by the potential increased cost of raising a pig. They calculated that it would cost $5 more for every 100 pounds of pork brought to market without the use of antibiotics, and this $5 was not worth it to Big Porky.

No, $5 was too much to invest for improved public health, safer foods, and fewer drug resistant infections in people.

And it isn’t just the American Pork Industry that lists your health last on its list of priorities.

## FDA Picks on Cherries While Drug Manufacturers Get Away With Murder

Since 2009, there have been [FOUR bills introduced that would end or severely limit your access to food supplements](http://www.anh-usa.org/supplements-still-in-peril/)!

So, at the same time as Big Pharma is resisting the movement to rid the livestock industry of the inappropriate use of antibiotic drugs, some members of Congress are trying to restrict your access to the things that will actually protect your health—vitamins, minerals, herbs, and other natural agents.

This is complete nonsense since food supplements used appropriately are not causing deaths, whereas more than [100,000 people are killed every year by pharmaceutical drugs](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2008/01/15/recreational-drugs-far-less-likely-to-kill-you-than-prescribed-drugs.aspx) taken legally and correctly prescribed.

In fact, pharmaceutical drugs are the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S., according to the [Journal of the American Medical Association (April 15, 1998)](http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/279/15/1200). [NSAIDS alone cause more than 16,000 deaths each year](http://www.healthsentinel.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2446:toxic-and-deadly-nsaids&catid=39:reports&Itemid=52), yet the FDA continues to protect NSAID manufacturers and even allows ads on television offering free samples for the taking.

Instead of the FDA hauling NSAID-makers out to the woodshed, they are spending their time [threatening cherry growers](http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2006/mar2006_cover_cherries_01.htm) for mentioning peer-reviewed studies about how cherries are far better than NSAIDS in controlling pain and inflammation.

How many people do you know who’ve been harmed or killed by cherries?

This issue is nicely summarized by the [Dr. Rath Health Foundation](http://www4.dr-rath-foundation.org/PHARMACEUTICAL_BUSINESS/laws_of_the_pharmaceutical_industry.htm):

“The survival of the pharmaceutical industry is dependent on the elimination by any means of effective natural health therapies. These natural and non-patentable therapies have become the treatment of choice for millions of people, despite the combined economic, political and media opposition of the world’s largest investment industry.”

I wholeheartedly agree.

## What You Can Do

Of the four pieces of legislation mentioned above, only the “Food Safety Bill” remains an immediate threat.

The other three bills were defeated BY YOU!

Here are two specific actions you can take to light a fire under government officials on these issues:

1. Food Democracy Now! has created a petition against the overuse of antibiotics in livestock production. If you care about this issue, I suggest you use this petition to make your voice heard. In the same way numerous prior bills have been shot out of the water as a direct result of public outcry, your action can put the kibosh on this one as well.

**Tell the FDA and the White House to stand up for human health by changing their policies about the reckless use of antibiotics in animal feed.**

1. The Alliance for Natural Health USA has put together a letter addressed to Congress in an effort to educate them that “supplements should not be regulated like drugs, and that the regulations already in place are completely sufficient.” All that is required of you is to fill out your contact information and click “send.”

For the purpose of supporting your own health, you might want to consider adding a high quality probiotic to your dietary regimen. There are a number of good ones on the market. I suggest you ask your local health food store for a recommendation. I also offer [an excellent probiotic](http://probiotics.mercola.com/probiotics.html) on my site, in addition to information about what to look for in all probiotic supplements.