



# What You Need to Know

**D**id you ever wonder why the management of certain infections and illnesses might differ depending on the pediatrician? Did you ever wonder why the same doctor would approach the same illness differently on separate occasions? Did you ever wonder why on some occasions your pediatrician couldn't provide a clear and definitive answer? Well, the answer is quite simple but can be a bit unnerving to patients and doctors alike... the practice of medicine is an art rather than a science.

There are certain standards of care that doctors abide by, but there is no hard and fast rule how to treat and manage disease. There are different protocols for treating cancer; different techniques to remove an appendix or to perform knee surgery; different approaches to managing Attention Deficit Disorder. The list goes on and on.

The human body is a wonderful and complex creation that does not always behave according to the medical literature or scientific studies. Scientific research has created breakthroughs in all areas of our healthcare that have increased life span and quality of life. The presentation of an illness manifests itself differently in every individual and patients respond and react differently to treatments.

You may have noticed that doctors have their own styles and approaches to managing the same illness. Some pediatricians may use amoxicillin to treat an infection while others may start with cefprozil, azithromycin or other antibiotics. Other pediatricians may prescribe pain medicine or recommend over-the-counter remedies before prescribing any antibiotics at all. With all these variations, how can you feel confident in the quality of care your child is receiving?

The first thing you should know is that you need to ask questions. Before you leave the pediatrician's office, make sure you know the diagnosis, the name of the medication, reason for the medication, possible side effects, and when to follow up. Ask the doctor what signs or symptoms will indicate that your child's condition is getting worse and when you should expect an improvement.

You should also be aware that there are different types of infections—some of which cannot be cured by an antibiotic. The two main types of infections your child will encounter can be categorized as bacterial or viral. Bacterial infections can only be cured with antibiotics. Strep throat, for example, is caused by Group A Streptococcus and if left untreated can cause serious complications that can impact the kidneys,

heart and other organ systems. Viral infections, on the other hand, do not require antibiotics and must be allowed to run their course.

This is often very frustrating to parents whose child has a fever and a harsh, croupy cough and they are told to treat the symptoms with an over-the-counter fever reducer and a humidifier and manage the best they can at home. It may make you feel better to have your child take prescription medicine, but prescribing unnecessary antibiotics for viral infections has caused many bacteria to become resistant to those medications. Know that antibiotics have their place but not in every situation.

Finally, you should know that it is important for your pediatrician to admit when she doesn't know the answer and refer your child to a specialist. A specialist should be considered when your child has a rare and/or complicated illness that needs special attention, your pediatrician is not familiar with the illness, or your pediatrician has attempted to take care of the problem but the issue has not resolved or is getting worse. If the condition is urgent and needs to be seen within one or two weeks, it is often helpful to request that your pediatrician call the specialist.

Partnering with your child's physician and working as a team is essential in facilitating effective and efficient medical care. Choosing a doctor you trust and whose style fits the needs of your child, knowing the right questions to ask, and having a physician who knows her limits are essential in fostering a strong doctor/patient relationship and receiving the best care for your child. ■

## About Dr. Liz

*Dr. Elizabeth Robinson Henry (Dr. Liz) has dedicated her life to providing youth with the knowledge and confidence to lead healthy and productive lives. She is the founder of Dr. Liz Consulting, a practice focused on making a difference in the lives of adolescents by addressing their physical, emotional, and mental needs. Teens, tweens and their parents can find resources on how to build self-confidence, manage anger and stress, and overcome issues such as bullying, emotions, fitting-in, and obesity at [www.drlizforyouth.com](http://www.drlizforyouth.com).*

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