

Urinary Tract Infection

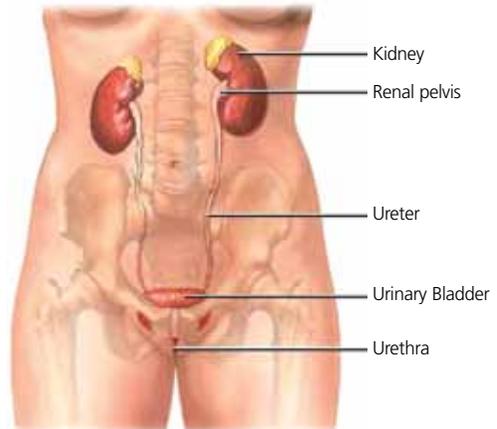
(Cystitis)

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection involving any part of the body's urinary system – kidneys, ureters, bladder or urethra. UTIs are common, especially in women and the elderly. Bladder infection, also called cystitis, is the most common type of UTI.

Kidneys remove water and waste from the blood to form urine. Ureters carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder, where it is stored until it is released from the body through the urethra. The urinary system and urine are normally sterile (contain no microorganisms), but microorganisms (e.g., bacteria) can enter the urinary tract through the urethra.

UTIs are usually caused by bacteria which normally live harmlessly in the intestines and bowel. If these bacteria spread to the urethra and get into the urinary system they can cause:

- **Urethritis** – infection in the urethra
- **Cystitis** – infection in the bladder, causing the bladder lining to become raw and inflamed
- **Pyelonephritis** – infection in the kidneys.



The female urinary tract. The male urinary tract differs only in the length of the urethra.

Most urinary tract infections are not contagious and cannot be passed on during sex. However urethritis, in both men and women, can also be caused by microorganisms that are sexually transmitted (e.g., chlamydia).

Signs and symptoms

The main symptoms of cystitis are:

- A prickly, scalding or burning sensation when passing urine
- The urge to urinate frequently, if only to pass a few drops (urgency)
- Cloudy, bloody or smelly urine
- Pain in the lower abdomen.

These symptoms can range from mild to severe.

Signs of a urinary tract infection in children also include fever, irritability, wetting in a previously 'dry' child and feeding problems in babies.

Urethritis commonly causes burning during urination, but usually the urine is not bloody or cloudy.

Kidney infection may cause cystitis symptoms, fever, chills, nausea, vomiting and back pain. A kidney infection is serious and needs urgent treatment by a doctor.

Bacteria can be present in urine without causing any symptoms of infection. This condition, called bacteruria, may not need any treatment.

Who is most at risk?

- **Women** – have a tendency to get UTIs because their urethra is so short. Sexually active women are most at risk because sex can push bacteria into the urethra. UTIs can be associated with hormone changes and women may be more likely to get UTIs during certain times of their menstrual cycle, during

pregnancy, after menopause and after a hysterectomy. Women are also more at risk of getting a UTI if they use spermicides or a diaphragm.

- **People with a urinary catheter** – a catheter is a tube inserted into the bladder to drain urine (e.g., after surgery).
- **Elderly people** – especially if unwell.
- **Diabetics** – can be less able to resist infection because they have a weaker immune system. Also, bacteria grow more easily in urine with a high sugar content.
- **Men with prostate problems** – who may have trouble with urine flow.
- **Babies and young children** – especially those born with a urinary tract abnormality.

Treatment

Sometimes mild cystitis can be treated by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids, especially water, to flush the urinary system
- Taking a urinary alkaliniser (e.g., *Ural*, *Citravescent*), to make the urine less acidic. This discourages bacterial growth and relieves the stinging and burning that occurs when passing urine. Ask a pharmacist for advice
- Avoiding acidic foods and drinks. They can aggravate the burning sensation when passing urine and can cancel out the effect of a urinary alkaliniser.

If these strategies are not successful, it is important to get medical help, as a urinary tract infection often needs to be

treated with an antibiotic. The doctor or nurse may ask for a urine sample to test for infection and/or to identify the bacteria in the urine. Urine tests help a doctor to prescribe an antibiotic that is effective against the bacteria causing the infection. A urinary tract infection usually clears quickly with the right antibiotic treatment.

Some people get frequent urinary tract infections and can benefit from preventive treatment. Treatments that may help prevent repeated urinary tract infections include:

- Long term, low dose antibiotics
- Vaginal oestrogen treatments for women after menopause
- Drinking cranberry juice drink, containing at least 25% cranberry juice, every day.

Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Collecting a urine sample

The best urine sample for testing is a mid-stream specimen of urine (MSSU or MSU).

Women – hold your labia apart. Men – pull back your foreskin. Pass a small amount of urine into the toilet first, then, without stopping the urine flow, pass a small amount of urine into a sterile container, then pass remaining urine into the toilet. If you can't give your urine sample to the clinic immediately, store it in a fridge, until you can take it to the clinic. Sterile specimen containers are available from a pharmacy.

Self care

The best way to reduce the likelihood of getting a urinary tract infection is to develop good habits of personal health and hygiene.

- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises not to).
- Wash your hands well after going to the toilet.
- Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the urge to urinate, rather than holding on.
- See a doctor quickly if you have UTI symptoms or problems with urine flow.

For women:

- Wipe yourself from front to back (urethra to anus) after urinating or opening your bowels
- Wash your genitals before sex and encourage your partner to do the same
- Have plenty of lubrication during sex
- Empty your bladder immediately after sex
- Wash your genital area every day
- Wear cotton rather than synthetic underwear
- Treat vaginal infections quickly
- Do not use spermicide products or a diaphragm for contraception.

For more information

Kidney Health Australia

Phone: 1800 4 KIDNEY (1800 4 543639)

Website: www.kidney.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

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