

Cystitis in women

What is cystitis?

Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder (the sac that stores urine) and is the most common type of urinary tract infection. It usually occurs when bacteria that normally live in the bowel travel up the short tube (*urethra*) that connects the bladder to the outside. Once inside the bladder, these bacteria quickly grow.



Cystitis is common in women of all ages. Around 30–50 per cent of women will have cystitis at some time in their lives. A woman is most likely to get cystitis when sexually active, while pregnant and after menopause. The infection cannot be passed to others during sex.

Women get cystitis more often than men because women have a shorter urethra. The urethral, vaginal and anal openings are also very close, making it easy for bacteria to be spread from one to the other.

What are the symptoms?

- Stinging or burning when you pass urine.
- Passing only small amounts of urine.
- An urge to pass urine more often.
- Feeling that the bladder is still full after passing urine.
- Smelly, cloudy, dark or bloody urine.
- Pain low down in the abdomen.
- Feeling unwell with nausea and fever.

Treatment

- A urine sample is necessary to test for infection.
- Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. You should take the full course even if you feel better, as some bacteria may still be active.
- Alkalinisers (such as *Citralite*, *Citravescent* or *Ural*) can help improve symptoms (such as stinging during urination) and can be purchased at a pharmacy and some supermarkets. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if these can be taken with any other medications you may be taking. Another option is to take one teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water (250ml) three times a day.

Home care

- Ensure you completely empty your bladder fully each time you urinate.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Take mild painkillers, such as paracetamol, for the pain (if necessary).
- Place a warm pack, such as a wheat bag or hot water bottle wrapped in a towel, on your abdomen or back to help relieve pain.

What to expect

While cystitis can be very uncomfortable, it is easy to treat with antibiotics. They act quickly and symptoms often improve within two days.

If symptoms persist, see your local doctor. Cystitis can become serious if left untreated, and may lead to kidney infection and sometimes kidney failure.

Can cystitis happen again?

Women who have had one infection are likely to develop another. This is more likely in sexually active women. Recurrent cystitis should be treated early, so see your local doctor if your urinary symptoms return. This is especially important if you are pregnant, as an untreated infection may affect the growth of your baby.

If your cystitis keeps coming back, you may need further tests and a referral to a urologist (a doctor who specialises in urinary problems) for further treatment. Some people need to take antibiotics every day to prevent repeat infections.



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Prevention

There are some simple measures you can take to prevent further attacks.

- Drink plenty of water.
- Pass urine often, empty your bladder completely and do not 'hold on'.
- Wipe yourself from front to back (urethra to anus) after going to the toilet.
- Use a lubricant during sex. If you are able to, try to avoid using spermicides and diaphragms. You can discuss other forms of contraception with your doctor.
- Pass urine after sex.
- Wear cotton underwear and avoid synthetic or tight-fitting clothing such as jeans or pantyhose.
- Avoid using soap or perfumed products on your genitals.
- Cranberry juice/capsules help prevent infections if taken daily (they stop bacteria sticking to the walls of the bladder). Tell your doctor if you are taking cranberry supplements as they may interfere with some antibiotics.

Notes:

Seeking help



In a **medical emergency** go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



See your local doctor or health-care professional for other medical problems including:

- severe pain in your back and/or loin
- fever or chills
- nausea or vomiting
- blood in your urine.



For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to **interpreting services** for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**.

*Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate



Want to know more?

- Ask your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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