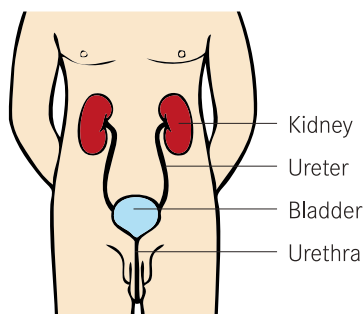


Urinary tract infections

What is a urinary tract infection?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are a group of infections of the urinary tract.

The most common UTI is *cystitis*, which is an infection of the bladder (where urine is stored). Other UTIs involve the *urethra* (*urethritis*) or kidneys (*pyelonephritis*).



What causes a urinary tract infection?

The most common cause of infection is a type of bacteria that normally lives in the bowel (called *Escherichia coli* or *E.coli*). The bacteria travel up the *urethra* (a tube from the bladder that urine passes through) to the bladder. Once inside the bladder, these bacteria quickly grow and cause an infection.

Other causes may be related to:

- an obstruction (blockage) in the flow of urine (such as a large kidney stone or enlarged prostate gland in men)
- an *indwelling urinary catheter* (IDC)
- sexual intercourse, especially in women.

Women and children are more likely to get cystitis than men. Females naturally have a shorter urethra than males, which means that there is less distance for bacteria to travel to reach the bladder. Also, the urethra, vagina and back passage (anus) are very near each other, making it easy for bacteria to be spread from one to the other.

Babies in nappies commonly get UTIs. Bacteria from a dirty nappy can easily cause infection, especially in girls. Even babies who are regularly changed and cleaned can still get a UTI.

What are the symptoms?

- Stinging or burning when passing urine.
- Passing very small amounts of urine.
- Feeling the need or 'urge' to pass urine frequently.
- Feeling that the bladder is still full after passing urine.

- Smelly, cloudy, dark or bloody urine.
- Pain low down in the abdomen or in the lower back or sides.
- 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 are feeling better, as some bacteria may still be active.
- **Urinary Alkalinisers** (such as *Citralite*, *Citravescent* or *Ural* sachets) can help improve symptoms such as stinging. You can buy these products at a pharmacy and some supermarkets. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if these can be taken with any other medications you (or your child, if being treated for a UTI) may be taking.

Home care

- Make sure you completely empty your bladder fully each time you urinate.
- Women should wipe from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Get plenty of rest to give your body a chance to fight the infection.
- If you have pain, take mild painkillers, such as paracetamol. If treating a child, carefully check the label for the correct dose and make sure you are not giving your child any other products containing paracetamol (such as some cough medicines and cold and flu preparations).
- 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. Antibiotics act quickly and the symptoms often improve within two days. Other UTIs may need a longer course of antibiotics.

If your symptoms are not getting better, see your local doctor. Some UTIs can become serious if left untreated, and may lead to a kidney infection which may cause permanent kidney damage.



Urinary tract infections

Can cystitis happen again?

Some people (including children) are likely to suffer from cystitis more than once. There are many reasons why this may happen, ranging from poor toilet habits (such as wiping from back to front - which transfers bacteria from your bowel to the opening of the urethra) to having a shorter urethra than normal.

If an infection comes back, it should be treated early. See your local doctor promptly if your symptoms return.

If infections are an ongoing problem you may need to see an urologist (a doctor who specialises in urinary problems) for further treatment. Some people need to take antibiotics every day to prevent repeat infections.

Prevention

Here are some simple ways you can try to help prevent another UTI.

General advice

- Drink plenty of water and encourage children to do the same.
- Pass urine often, empty your bladder completely and do not 'hold on' when you need to go. Encourage your child to do the same.

Advice for women

- Wipe yourself from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Avoid synthetic or tight-fitting clothing such as jeans or pantyhose.
- Avoid using soap or perfumed products on your genitals.
- Use a lubricant during sex.
- Cranberry juice or capsules may help to prevent future infections if taken every day. They stop the bacteria from sticking to the walls of the bladder. Tell your doctor if you are taking cranberry supplements as they may interfere with some antibiotics. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the use of cranberry capsules before you give them to your child.

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 if you do not get better, even if you have taken antibiotics. This includes having symptoms such as:

- 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.
- Speak to a pharmacist.
- Visit the **Better Health Channel** www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Notes:

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 8064 or email edfactsheets@dhs.vic.gov.au

June 2008. Also available online at www.health.vic.gov.au/edfactsheets

Disclaimer: This health information is for general education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.