

## Urinary Tract Infection

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Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are infections that affect either the bladder or the kidneys. Bladder infections are more common than kidney infections. Both are common in women and rare in men.

“Cystitis” refers to a bladder infection/ inflammation. It is usually caused by bacteria that inhabit the intestinal system and nearby rectal area and then are introduced into the urethral opening. Other risk factors include inadequate water intake and not urinating when the urge is present. Some women are more prone to UTIs if their mother, grandmother or sister has history of frequent UTIs.

“Pyelonephritis” refers to kidney infections. The bacteria get to the kidneys either from the bladder up the ureters to the kidneys or through the bloodstream. Kidney infections are less common but are more serious.

“Urethritis” is inflammation of the urethra. Symptoms are similar to a bladder infection. Causes of urethritis include STD infections, yeast infections and irritation from not having enough lubrication during intercourse, or frequent or rougher intercourse (“honeymoon cystitis”). Bicycling and horseback riding are activities that can cause urethral irritation; and caffeine, sodas, and some medications can cause UTI-like symptoms. Bladder muscle dysfunction/interstitial cystitis can make you think you have a UTI because of the symptoms, but there is no true infection.

### SYMPTOMS

Bladder infection:

- ◆ Pain or burning when you urinate
- ◆ Frequent urination
- ◆ Feeling as if you have to urinate suddenly (urgency)
- ◆ Blood in the urine

Kidney infection:

- ◆ **Symptoms above may or may not be present**
- ◆ Fever

- ◆ Nausea/vomiting
- ◆ Back pain (flank pain; not low back pain)

Urethritis:

- ◆ UTI symptoms possible
- ◆ Change in vaginal discharge or discharge that is itchy or irritating
- ◆ Redness or swelling at urethra (where you pee)
- ◆ Genital blisters, bumps, or ulcers

### DIAGNOSIS

A urinalysis (urine sample ) is done to confirm a UTI. The staff in the laboratory explain how to get the urine specimen. Sometimes a culture is also done on the urine to identify the bacteria and determine antibiotic sensitivity. Kidney infections are diagnosed by the clinician who evaluates both your exam and the urinalysis.

Urethritis is suspected when someone has typical UTI symptoms but the urinalysis or culture are negative. Referral to the Women’s Clinic or to your gynecologist are recommended if further evaluation and investigation would help in diagnosis and treatment

### TREATMENT

- ◆ **Drink plenty of water.** Although it may hurt to urinate, drinking lots of water will actually help to alleviate symptoms and is protective for the kidneys.
- ◆ An over the counter medication to soothe symptoms is Azo<sup>®</sup> (pyridium). This medication does NOT kill or flush out bacteria or treat a UTI in any way. It is to be used only short-term and is only for relief of symptoms until you can get to see a medical provider.
- ◆ Antibiotics are prescribed for UTIs. If symptoms are worse or not improving after several days, follow-up with a provider is recommended to determine the best course of management.

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- ◆ Avoid caffeine and alcohol as these can irritate an already irritated bladder .
- ◆ Avoid intercourse.

## PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Recent medical literature states that the following recommendations have not been proven by studies; however, most medical providers still recommend the following:

- ◆ Water! Water! Water!
- ◆ Urinate after sexual activity. The theory is that this helps to flush out any bacteria introduced into the urethra.
- ◆ When using the bathroom, wipe front to back to avoid contaminating genital area with rectal bacteria.
- ◆ Cranberry juice or cranberry tablets can help by decreasing ability of the bacteria to stick to the bladder wall .
- ◆ Urinate when you get the urge; don't "hold it" all day.
- ◆ Avoid douching.

## APPOINTMENTS

**If online appointments are full, CALL 231-6444 and you will often be given an appointment same day. All of our appointments are not online so we have openings for urgent situations.**

Make an appointment at the Women's Clinic if you are concerned your symptoms may be from an STD, recently have engaged in unprotected intercourse with a new partner, or UTI symptoms are not responding to the antibiotic you were prescribed.

## Websites

American Family Physician <http://familydoctor.org>  
Mayo Clinic [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases)