

Urinary Tract Infections in Women

Urinary Tract Infection

A urinary tract infection is a common medical problem for women. It can affect your kidneys, bladder or urethra (tube from your bladder to the outside of your body). Other names for this include bladder infection, cystitis and UTI.

The infection is caused by a bacteria (germ) in your intestinal tract and around your vagina. Women are more prone to urinary tract infections than men because their urethral and anal openings are close together. This makes it easy for bacteria to spread into the bladder.

It is often cured quickly if it is treated before it reaches your kidneys, and if you follow the treatment instructions.

Symptoms

Some symptoms of a urinary tract infection include:

- need to urinate a lot
- urgency to urinate
- burning feeling when you urinate
- blood in your urine
- unusual color or odor to your urine
- mild cramps
- lower abdominal pressure
- low back pain
- fever.

Some urinary tract infections have just a few or mild symptoms.

Diagnosing a Urinary Tract Infection

At the clinic, you will:

- answer questions to see if you have a simple urinary tract infection
- give a urine sample. It will be tested for white blood cells, which your body makes when fighting an infection.

Your health care provider will also order a urine culture that can be done using your urine sample. This test will find out what type of bacteria is causing the infection. The test results will be ready in about 48 hours.

Your health care provider may also choose to treat you just based on your symptoms.

Treatment

- A urinary tract infection can be treated with antibiotics.
 - If you are given a prescription, be sure to take all of your medicine until it is gone.
 - You may feel better in a few days, but you must take all of the medicine or the infection may return and be more difficult to treat.
- Drink at least ten 8-ounce glasses of water each day, unless your health care provider tells you otherwise.
- Avoid coffee, tea, alcohol and carbonated beverages. They can irritate your bladder.
- Avoid being out in the sun for long periods of time.

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- Wash before and after sexual intercourse.

If you have urinary tract infections that keep coming back, you may need a urologic checkup.

How to Keep From Getting a Urinary Tract Infection

- Empty your bladder every 3 to 4 hours. Avoid holding urine for long periods of time.
- Drink six to eight 8-ounce glasses each day so you urinate about every 4 hours.
- Wear all-cotton or cotton-crotch underwear and pantyhose.
- Change your underwear and pantyhose every day or whenever soiled.
- Change your tampons and pads often.
- Avoid irritants such as perfumed vaginal cleaners or deodorants.
- Empty your bladder before and after sexual intercourse.
- Do not use a vaginal diaphragm if you have a lot of urinary tract infections.

When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have:

- back pain
- chills or a temperature higher than 100.4 F
- nausea (upset stomach) or vomiting (throwing up)
- no change in your symptoms for 3 days
- any questions or concerns.