



Urinary Tract Infections

What is a UTI?

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is a very common infection that occurs when bacteria enter and multiply anywhere along the normally sterile urinary tract.

The infection and resulting inflammation can involve the urethra (urethritis), the bladder (cystitis), sometimes the ureters, and occasionally the kidneys (pyelonephritis).

What are the Symptoms of a Urinary Tract Infection?

An infection in the urinary tract can cause several symptoms. You may have one or a combination of these symptoms:

- a strong and frequent need to urinate (urgency and frequency)
- pain when urinating (dysuria)
- small urine volume
- some cramping in the lower pelvic region
- bloody, cloudy, or foul-smelling urine
- pain in your lower back or flank pain
- chills or fever
- lack of appetite or lack of energy
- sand-like material (sediment) in the urine

What Causes a UTI?

UTIs have a number of causes. Most are caused by bacteria normally present on the skin or in the intestinal tract that invade the urinary tract. Because a woman's urethra is shorter and is closer to the rectum than a man's, women suffer many more UTIs than men do. Other causes include overstretching of the bladder, urine left in the bladder (incomplete voiding), and urethral irritation caused by chemical or mechanical irritants that may result in inflammation and infection.

How are UTIs Diagnosed?

If you feel like you have an infection or see blood in your urine see your health care provider right away. Your provider will ask for a urine specimen so it can be examined under a microscope for white blood cells, red blood cells, and bacteria. Sometimes people with recurrent infections will need to have their urine cultured to determine which bacterial organisms are causing the infection. Sensitivity studies determine which antibiotics are effective for those organisms.

How Can I Prevent Myself from Getting a UTI?

There are many actions that can minimize your risk of getting a UTI, these include:

- Drinking plenty of liquids (six to eight glasses per day) will keep the urinary tract flushed. Concentrated, stagnant urine can allow bacteria to multiply.
- Always urinate when you feel the need. Overfilling the bladder can cause irritation and microscopic tears in the bladder wall, which lead to infection. Voiding at least every four hours during the day prevents bladder overfilling and does not allow urine to stagnate.
- Practice good hygiene to avoid spreading bacteria. Women should wipe from front to back after urination or bowel movements.

- Urinating after sexual intercourse will keep the urethra flushed of bacteria that may have entered it.
- Avoid products that may irritate the urinary area such as douches, sprays, perfumes, spermicides, diaphragms, and deodorants.
- Identify if particular forms of sexual activity (anal intercourse, frequent or dry intercourse, abrasion of the urethral area) cause you to get a UTI.
- Keeping the vaginal area dry will make it harder for bacteria to grow. Wearing cotton underwear, non-confining clothes, and allowing airflow can help keep the area dry.
- Caffeine, alcohol, carbonated drinks, and some spices may be irritating to the bladder and should be minimized.
- Drinking cranberry juice may help prevent a UTI by creating an environment in which bacteria cannot grow as easily. Cranberry juice will NOT cure an already established UTI.

What is the Treatment for a Urinary Tract Infection?

The treatment for a simple UTI is with antibiotics. Generally an adequate course of antibiotics will kill the bacteria and enable the bladder to heal. Increasing your fluid intake, voiding frequently, and avoiding bladder irritants will also help your urinary tract heal more quickly.

Urinary tract infections should respond rapidly to treatment with antibiotics. Failure to notice improvement in symptoms within twenty-four to forty-eight hours may indicate drug resistance or other problems.

If you develop fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, or back pain associated with your bladder infection, it may indicate your kidneys are involved in the infection and you should return promptly to the clinic for reevaluation.