

# Urinary tract infection

## (Cystitis)

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is a general term used to describe an infection involving any part of the urinary system. This includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder or urethra. UTIs are common, especially in females and the elderly. The most common type of UTIs are bladder infections, also known as cystitis.

Most UTIs are caused by bacteria which normally live harmlessly in the bowel. If these bacteria spread from the anus to the urethra and up into the urinary system they can cause:

- **urethritis** – infection in the urethra
- **cystitis** – infection in the bladder
- **pyelonephritis** – infection in the kidneys.

Most UTIs are not contagious and cannot be passed from person to person. However, some types of urethritis can be caused by sexually transmitted infections (e.g. chlamydia).

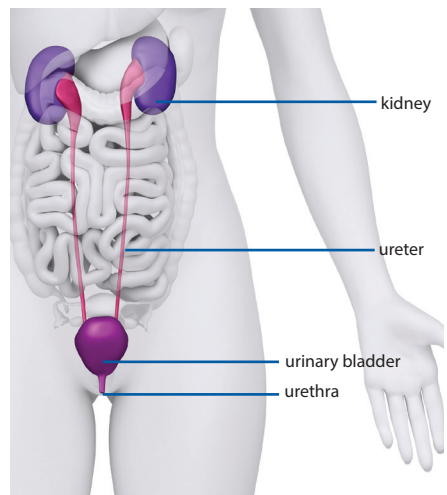
### Signs and symptoms

Symptoms of UTIs can be mild or severe. Common symptoms of a UTI include:

- a prickly, stinging or burning feeling when passing urine
- a strong urge to urinate often and urgently, even if only a few drops

- a feeling that the bladder is still full after urinating
- pain in the lower abdomen (belly)
- cloudy, bloody or strong-smelling urine.

UTIs are not usually a serious condition. However, they can lead to a serious kidney infection if left



untreated. A kidney infection is serious and needs urgent treatment by a doctor. Kidney infection can cause fever, chills, nausea, vomiting and back or side pain, with or without the symptoms of cystitis.

In young children UTIs may cause fever, jaundice, vomiting, lethargy, being irritable, 'wetting' in a child who is toilet-trained, and poor feeding.

In elderly people, UTIs may cause confusion, delirium or changes in behavior.

## Who is most at risk?

- **Females** – tend to get UTIs because the female urethra is short and close to the anus. Sexually active females have a higher risk because sex can push bacteria into the urethra. UTIs can also be the result of hormone changes such as the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause.
- **People with a urinary catheter** – a catheter is a tube put into the bladder to drain urine (e.g. after surgery).
- **People with a blockage or defect** in their urinary system.
- **Elderly people** – especially if they have bladder or bowel problems.
- **People with diabetes** – can have changes in their bladder, urine and immune system that lead to recurrent UTIs.
- **People with a weakened immune system**

- **Babies and young children** – especially those born with a defect in their urinary system.

## Treatment

Ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice. The following treatment options are available over-the-counter:

### Pain relief

- Urinary alkalinisers (e.g. *Ural*, *Citravescent*) make urine less acidic. This reduces the stinging or burning feeling caused by passing urine.
- Simple pain relievers (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) can reduce pain and discomfort.

### Antibiotics

Promptly see your doctor when you develop UTI symptoms. UTIs usually need to be treated with prescription antibiotics:

- Take prescribed antibiotics as directed by your doctor. It is important to finish the course of antibiotics and not stop early if UTI symptoms improve or resolve.
- UTI symptoms often improve within two days of starting treatment with an antibiotic.

## Recurring UTIs

People who experience frequent UTIs may benefit from treatment that aims to prevent future infections. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

## Self care

Actions that can help to clear cystitis include:

- Drink 1.5 litres more fluid than usual to keep hydrated while flushing the bacteria out of the urinary tract.
- Empty your bladder completely when urinating.

Actions that may reduce the risk of getting UTIs include:

- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises you not to).
- Urinate when you feel the urge, rather than holding on.
- Empty your bladder completely when urinating.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Avoid using perfumed soap or talcum powder around your genital area.
- Drinking cranberry juice is not proven to be effective in preventing UTIs. Seek advice from your pharmacist or doctor for more information.

### For females also:

- Wipe from front to back (urethra to anus) after passing urine or emptying your bowels.
- Empty your bladder soon after sex.
- Wash your genital area every day.
- Treat vaginal infections quickly.
- Eat natural yoghurt to restore normal vaginal flora balance.

## Important

Some UTIs can be serious. Get medical attention straight away if:

- your symptoms are not improving within 2 or 3 days after starting antibiotic treatment
- your symptoms return within 2 weeks after finishing antibiotic treatment
- you have symptoms of a kidney infection (fever, chills, back or side pain, nausea or vomiting)
- you are pregnant and have symptoms of a UTI
- you have diabetes or a weakened immune system and have symptoms of a UTI
- you are over 65 years of age and have symptoms of a UTI
- a child has symptoms of a UTI.

## For more information

### **Kidney Health Australia**

Phone: 1800 454 363

Website: <https://kidney.org.au>

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

### **NPS MedicineWise**

#### **Medicines Line**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets

### **Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 for expert advice.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.***

## Related Fact Cards

- » *Antibiotics*
- » *Bladder and urine control*
- » *Menopause*
- » *Prostate problems*

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