

Urinary tract infection

What is it?

A urinary tract infection is usually caused by bacteria getting into the bladder and causing inflammation. It is a very common condition.

Bacteria are everywhere in the environment. They get into the bladder by working their way up the tube (urethra) through which you pass urine.

What are the symptoms?

You may have one or more of the following symptoms:-

- pain in the lower part of your tummy,
- a burning sensation as you pass urine,
- feeling you need to pass urine but having difficulty,
- cloudy urine,
- urine with a strong smell,
- blood in your urine,
- incontinence,
- mysterious rises in your temperature,
- shivering,
- backpain,
- soreness of the skin between the legs.

Sometimes an infection can cause confusion and/or collapse.

Who is at risk?

The chances of getting an infection are greater if:-

- your system has the habit of forming stones in the kidneys or bladder.
- you were born with a deformity in your urinary system.
- you are a woman. This is because the tube from the bladder to the outside is shorter than in men and opens nearer the back passage. This makes it easier for infections to get in. Sometimes women are more prone to infections due to damage during child-bearing.
- you are constipated. This is because the pressure on the bladder can put you at risk of infection.
- you delay passing water. This is because bacteria can breed in the bladder if you put off going to the toilet.

continued

Urinary tract infection - continued

- you do not drink enough. This is because the urine can become concentrated and can act as an irritant. You may become dehydrated if:-
 - a) you are in the habit of drinking only small amounts of fluid,
 - b) you are in a perpetually hot atmosphere,
 - c) you have a temperature for some reason.

How is it diagnosed?

Tests are generally quite simple. We will take a sample of your urine and test it with chemical sticks. We will also send a sample of your urine to the laboratory to see if any infecting bacteria can be found. If you are poorly with the infection or you cannot bear the symptoms, we may start treating you before the laboratory test is available.

How is it treated?

- Drinking plenty of water will help. Your nurse will tell you how much it is safe to drink.
- Good personal hygiene is always a help and your nurse will assist you if you are in difficulties.
- A teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda taken by mouth in warm water can help to relieve burning pain.
- You may find it helps to have warmth over your bladder. This can be from a hot water bottle, if you can use one safely, or from a safe, heated electric pad.

Antibiotics are commonly used to treat bacterial infection. Sometimes more than one course is needed to rid your system of the infection.

Sometimes these infections can be very persistent. If you are not happy that it has cleared up, please discuss this with your ward doctor.

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(Written by a consultant geriatrician and checked by volunteer readers)

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