

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

Patient Fact Sheet

Introduction

Urinary tract infections (UTI's) are the most common bacterial infections in humans of all ages. UTI's are most often caused by *E. coli*, a normal bacteria found in the intestine. Women and female children are at a higher risk for UTI since the female urethra (tube that empties urine from the bladder out of the body) is shorter than the male urethra. In addition, the urethra in females is close to the vagina and anus. Usually UTI's are not complicated and can be quickly cured when treated with the right antibiotic. Sometimes, UTI's can become chronic or develop into a more serious infection involving the kidneys, known as pyelonephritis. If you develop pyelonephritis, you might need to go into the hospital in order to have antibiotics given to you through a vein (IV).

The symptoms that you might notice include

- Burning, or pain when passing urine
- Urgent need to pass urine frequently, and feeling that there is still urine in the bladder when finished
- Bladder pain or pressure with occasional lower back or pelvic ache
- Cloudy, milky, blood-tinged and/or foul-smelling urine
- Low-grade fever, chills, fatigue

Signs that your health care provider may find on examination

- Urine test shows nitrites (which means there are bacteria and red and white blood cells in the urine)
- Lab tests show bacteria growing from a sample of urine collected in a clean procedure
- Red or white blood cells seen in the urine under a microscope
- Low-grade fever

Possible reasons for Urinary Tract Infections

- Wiping habits after passing urine (females should wipe from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria)
- Weakened immune system (such as in people with diabetes, immune disorders or cancer)
- Pregnancy
- Gender (females more likely to have UTI)
- Sexual intercourse – because the urethra is located close to the vagina and rectum, germs that belong in the vagina and rectum can easily be spread and infect the bladder
- Enlarged prostate (BPH) or prostate infection in males
- Incomplete bladder emptying

Treatment

- Prescribed antibiotics. It is important to take all prescribed doses of medication to be sure that all bacteria are dead, even if you begin to feel better.
- There are some medications to decrease the burning feeling that may change the color of your urine

Prevention

- Females should wipe from front to back after passing urine.
- Females should pass urine both before and after sexual intercourse to keep bacteria from spreading into the bladder
- Drink plenty of water (unless you have been told to limit your fluid intake for other reasons); cranberry juice *may* be helpful
- Follow your healthcare provider's directions (you may need more urine tests)
- Call your healthcare provider immediately if you are still having symptoms

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