

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in the urine collecting system. UTIs are the most common type of bacterial infections affecting the human body. An infection in the urethra is called urethritis. If the infection is in the bladder it is called cystitis. If the infection is higher in the tract, affecting the kidneys, it is called pyelonephritis. It is possible to have an infection of any one, or all, parts of the system.

Urethritis is an inflammation of the urethra, the tube that leads from the bladder to the outside of the body. Because of its longer length, the male urethra is much more susceptible to inflammation and infection than the shorter female urethra. The most common causes of urethritis are the bacteria causing gonorrhea and chlamydial infections. If left untreated, urethritis can cause prostatitis, an infection of the prostate gland.

Urethritis symptoms for men include:

- Discharge from the penis
- Pain when urinating
- Tenderness in the urethra, and often in the surrounding organs such as testes and bladder
- Increase in the frequency of urination
- A feeling of urgency or feeling like you have to urinate but only produce a few drops

In women the symptoms are similar to those listed for cystitis (see below).

Cystitis is usually caused by bacteria entering the urinary system, moving up the urethra, and multiplying in the urine. Chronic constipation, enlarged prostate, kidney stones, pregnancy and the use of the contraceptive diaphragm can all contribute to having cystitis. These cause blockage of the urethra. Blockage makes it difficult to empty the bladder fully, and therefore, enables bacteria to resist being flushed out while urinating. Cystitis can occur at any age, and women get cystitis more often than men. In women the urethra is short and relatively close to the rectum. This makes it easy for bacteria from the rectum and surrounding tissues to enter the urethra during sexual intercourse and after going to the bathroom. Cystitis symptoms include:

- Increase in the frequency of urination
- Pain in the lower abdomen
- Stinging or burning with urination
- Foul smelling, cloudy or bloody urine

- Pain in the lower abdomen

Pyelonephritis is an infection that is caused by bacteria moving up to the kidney, usually from a bladder infection that has not been treated. It is potentially more serious than urethritis or cystitis. If left untreated it can cause permanent damage to the kidney. Like cystitis, pyelonephritis is much more common in women than in men. It is a frequent complication of pregnancy, labor and delivery. Pyelonephritis symptoms include:

- Any or all of the symptoms of cystitis
- Flu-like symptoms which include headache, body aches, chills, and fever
- Vomiting
- Lower back, flank and abdominal pain

Symptoms

A health care provider cannot diagnose a UTI by your symptoms alone. A urine or discharge sample must be examined under a microscope to detect bacteria and/or blood.

If you have urethritis, you may also be advised to contact your sexual partner for treatment. If you have cystitis or pyelonephritis you may be advised to drink a lot of water during your treatment - up to two quarts a day! You may also be advised to drink up to a quart of cranberry juice cocktail a day (NOT other fruit juice) to make your urine more acid. Acid urine helps fight some bacteria that cause UTIs. Be aware that cranberry juice cocktail is very high in sugar and has 135 calories per glass.

Your symptoms should go away in three to four days after you begin treatment. Be sure to take all the medicine as directed EVEN IF YOU FEEL WELL AND YOUR SYMPTOMS ARE GONE. You are not cured until all your medicine has been taken.

Prevention and Treatment

Here are some easy things you can do to help prevent UTIs:

- Wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom (to keep rectal bacteria from entering the urethra and moving up the bladder).
- Drink enough water to keep the urine clear. Adults need at least 8 eight ounce glasses of water a day.
- Always urinate as soon as you feel the need and empty your bladder completely
- Urinate after sexual intercourse.
- Avoid vaginal intercourse after anal intercourse.
- Always use condoms.

Remember UTIs do not pose a serious threat to your health if diagnosed and treated early.

Call (858) 534-8089 to schedule an appointment at Student Health.