

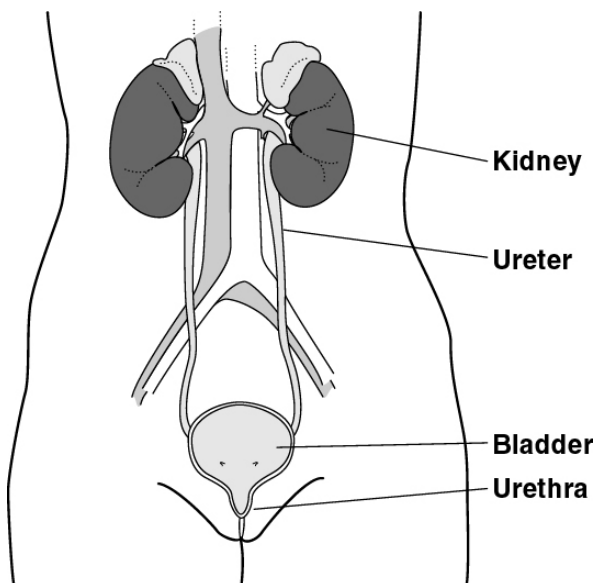
Urinary Tract Infections Information for Women

The Facts

A urinary tract infection (UTI) refers to the presence of germs in the urinary tract. Most UTI's are caused by bacteria such as E. coli.

The urinary tract includes the kidneys, the ureters, the bladder, and the urethra (see diagram below). A UTI may involve any of these parts. Infection in the bladder is called a lower urinary tract infection. Those in the kidneys and ureters are called upper urinary tract infections.

It is thought that 10 to 20% of women have a UTI at some point in their lives. As we age, the number of UTIs may increase. These infections are often treated with antibiotics. There are things you can do to prevent UTIs.



Signs and Symptoms

The symptoms of a UTI include:

- Pain or burning while passing urine (dysuria)
- Going to the bathroom often
- Having a strong urge to pass urine
- Abdominal, back or side (flank) pain.
- Bloody or cloudy urine
- Strong smelling urine
- Fever or chills
- Nausea

****Important to note women can have symptoms of a UTI without true urinary infection. The symptoms can be due to other underlying problems.**

Testing and Diagnosis

Your health care provider will ask you your symptoms. You may also need a urine test. This test will look for red or white blood cells, or bacteria in the urine. Sometimes other infections (i.e., of the vagina) can mimic the signs and symptoms of a UTI. In these cases, a vaginal culture and a pelvic exam may be needed.

Treatment

Most often UTIs are treated with antibiotics. Your health care provider will decide on the length of time you will need to take the antibiotics. You may need treatment for 3 days to two weeks.

It is important to take **all** the medicine even though you may feel better. If you stop treatment too early, the infection may still be present or it could come back.

Try to drink 10 to 15 glasses of fluids each day. This will dilute your urine and flush out the bacteria. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and intercourse during the treatment period. These can further irritate the bladder.

Risk Factors

Women are more prone to UTIs than men. In a woman, the urethra, the vagina, and the rectum are close to each other. This allows for the bacteria from the rectum and vagina to transfer to the urethra. Factors that may put a woman at increased risk for a UTI include:

- Recent catheterization
- Sexual intercourse
- Diaphragm or cervical cap use
- Douching
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Having had UTIs as a child
- Being postmenopausal
- Tub baths

Prevention

You can't prevent all UTIs, but here are some ideas that may help you to avoid them.

- Wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom or having a bowel movement.
- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of fluid (decaffeinated) a day. Caffeine irritates the bladder.
- Empty your bladder before and after intercourse.
- Urinate when you have the urge or at least every 2 to 4 hours.
- Wash your perianal area with soap and water daily.
- Wear cotton or cotton-crotched underwear. Avoid tight clothing.
- Change out of wet swimsuits and wear dry, cotton underwear.
- Try different positions during sex that cause less friction to the urethra (opening of the urine channel).
- Taking tub baths.

Many UTIs

If you have many UTIs (4 or more a year), consult with your health care provider. They may recommend more testing, switching to other forms of birth control or preventative (prophylactic) treatment with antibiotics.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4286