



OFFICE OF POPULATION AFFAIRS

Urinary Tract Infection Fact Sheet

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What is a urinary tract infection?

The urinary tract has four parts:

- **Kidneys** – collect waste from blood to make urine.
- **Ureters** (YOOR-uh-turz) – two tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder.
- **Bladder** – sack-like organ that stores urine.
- **Urethra** (yoo-REE-thruh) – a tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body.

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in part of the urinary tract.

- A UTI in the bladder can be annoying or painful.
- If a UTI spreads to the kidneys, it can be a serious problem.

What causes a urinary tract infection?

- Bacteria (bak-TIHR-ee-uh) are a type of germ.
- Normally, urine does not contain any bacteria.

- A UTI occurs when bacteria get into the urinary tract.
- Most often, UTIs are caused by bacteria from the digestive tract.
- The bacteria first travel to the urethra.
- Infection in the urethra is called urethritis.
- Bacteria can move to the bladder and cause a bladder infection.
- Bladder infections are also called cystitis.
- If the bacteria pass through the ureters up to the kidney, they can cause a kidney infection.
- Another name for kidney infection is pyelonephritis (pi-LO-nef-rite-is). Pyelonephritis can be serious. Sometimes people with pyelonephritis need to stay in the hospital for several days.

What are the symptoms of a urinary tract infection?

Some common symptoms of UTI are:

- Pain or stinging when passing urine.
- A strong urge to pass urine.

- Pressure in the lower belly.
- Urine that smells bad.
- Urine that looks milky, cloudy, or reddish in color. If you see blood in your urine, tell a doctor right away.
- Feeling tired or shaky.
- Fever.

Are there tests for urinary tract infection?

Usually two tests are done to check for a UTI.

- Urinalysis – this test looks for cells and certain chemicals in the urine
- Urine culture – this test checks for bacteria in the urine.

How is a urinary tract infection treated?

- UTIs are treated with antibiotics (an-tuh-beye-OT-iks).
- Antibiotics are medicines that kill bacteria.
- A health care provider must write a prescription for antibiotics.

- It is important to take all the medicine, even if the symptoms go away before the medicine is gone.
- Many people feel better in one or two days.
- Small infections need three days of medicine. Larger infections need seven days or more of medicine.
- It is important to tell the health care provider about any allergies to medicines.

Is there a way to avoid urinary tract infection?

**Sometimes changing daily habits can prevent UTIs.
If you get UTIs a lot, try these ideas.**

- Drink lots of fluid. Water is best. Try for 6 to 8 glasses a day. Fluid can wash the bacteria from your system.
- Drink cranberry juice or take vitamin C.
- Urinate frequently. Go to the bathroom when you first feel the urge.
- Urinate soon after sex. This can wash away bacteria that might have gotten into the urethra during sex.

- After using the toilet, always wipe from front to back. This is very important after a bowel movement.
- Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothes. This helps keep the area dry.
- Don't use the diaphragm or spermicides for birth control.
- Choose lubricated condoms without spermicides. Or use a lubricant (without spermicides).

Sources:

National Institutes of Health

- Urinary tract infection in adults
- What I need to know about urinary tract infections

US Department of Health and Human Services

- Urinary tract infection

National Institutes of Health

- Urinary tract infections



**U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C.**