

What is a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are the second most common type of infection in the body. Women are more prone to UTI's although the condition also affects men. The urinary tract is the group of internal organs that make, transport, store and remove urine from the body. These include the Kidneys, Ureter (tube that carries urine from kidney to bladder), bladder and urethra (tube that carries urine from bladder to the outside of the body). The most common part of the urinary tract to get an infection is the bladder. Infection here is called "cystitis". Most UTIs are caused by bacteria. Yeast and fungi can be other causes. Usually the body flushes out the bacteria when you urinate, however this may not always happen.

What can cause a UTI?

People who suffer from the following conditions are more at risk of developing UTI's:

- Kidney or bladder stones
- Diabetes or any other disorder that suppresses the immune system.
- Incomplete bladder emptying.
- Prostate problems in men causing bladder outlet obstruction.
- Narrowing (stricture) in the urethra also causing bladder outlet obstruction
- Menopause in women.
- Faecal incontinence.
- Urinary catheters.

Other groups who are more vulnerable to developing UTI's are:

- The elderly.
- Pregnant women
- Those who have an insufficient fluid intake- typically less than 2-3 litres per day.
- Women who use a diaphragm (cap) as a form of contraceptive.

How do you know if you have a UTI?

Symptoms of a UTI may include:

- A burning/stinging sensation when passing urine.
- Frequent or strong urges to pass urine even when you have little to pass.
- Cloudy, dark or blood stained urine.
- Foul smelling urine.
- Pain in your back or lower abdomen.
- Confusion (especially in the elderly).

You may not experience all of these symptoms.

How do I obtain a urine sample?

- The aim is to get a specimen (sample) of urine from the middle of your bladder. Urine is normally sterile (no bacteria present). If bacteria are found in the sample, it means that the urine is infected. A midstream sample (MSU) is best as the first bit of urine that you pass may be contaminated with bacteria from the skin.
- Prior to doing an MSU, wash your hands and genitals.
- Women - hold open your labia (entrance to the vagina).
- Men - pull back your foreskin.
- Pass some urine into the toilet. Then, without stopping the flow of urine, catch some urine in a sterile bottle. (The bottle is usually provided by a doctor or nurse.) Once you have enough urine in the bottle, finish off passing the rest of your urine into the toilet.
- **Do not** open the sterile bottle until you are ready to take the sample. You do not need to fill the bottle to the top, a small amount will do. (Some specimen bottles contain a preservative. If this is the case, a mark on the bottle will indicate the ideal amount of urine. However, if that is difficult, any amount is better than none.
- Avoid touching any part of your genitals with the bottle, as this will increase the risk of contamination.
- Put the cap back on the container.

The sooner the sample is given in to the doctor's surgery, or to the laboratory, the better. Within two hours is best. If that is not possible, put the sample in the fridge until you take it to the doctor or laboratory. The result of an MSU takes 2-3 days.

What is the purpose of a Mid-Stream Urine Test (MSU)?

- ***To confirm the diagnosis of a urine infection.***

The usual symptoms of a urine infection are pain when you pass urine, and passing urine frequently. However, symptoms are not always typical, particularly in children and the elderly, and a urine test is needed.

- ***To decide the best antibiotic to use.***

Some bacteria (germs) are resistant to some antibiotics. If the test shows that bacteria are in the urine then the bacteria are tested against various antibiotics. This finds which antibiotics will kill the bacteria in the urine.

How can I reduce the chances of getting further infections?

There are several things which you can do regularly to reduce your chances of getting further infections:

- ***Drink plenty of water***

Two litres or more fluid in a day is recommended, preferably in the form of water or bland non-sugary, not fizzy, drinks

- ***Pass urine when you feel the need***

As a rough rule you should pass urine every three hours or more often. **Do not** resist the desire to pass this when you feel the need to

- ***Take your time passing urine***

Get into the habit of sitting comfortably on the toilet. Relax, take your time, and try to get the bladder as empty as possible. When you think you have finished, sit and wait an extra few minutes and try to pass urine again.

Undertaking these three measures will help to keep the bladder flushed through and help prevent bacteria from proliferating.

Extra Helpful Hints:

- Blot dry after passing urine.
- Wipe from front to back after bowel movement.
- If possible wash around the back passage after bowel motion.
- Avoid constipation.
- **Do not** use bubble bath, soap wipes, perfumes or anything similar around the vaginal area.

- A small glass of cranberry juice taken regularly helps make infections less likely. There is some evidence that vitamin C supplements may also help in this regard.
- Avoid tight fitting jeans, tights and wear cotton underpants.
- Take live natural yogurt as this can help to build up natural bugs that may help inhibit more harmful bugs.

How is it treated?

If symptoms persist, please see your GP or healthcare provider.

If you are prone to UTI's after sexual intercourse.

The physical act of having intercourse tends to push bugs (bacteria) up the water passage (urethra). This is particularly likely after having sex the first time or after intense or frequent sex after a period of abstinence. Measures to undertake related to intercourse:

- ***Avoid spermicides***

Use of spermicides makes urine infection more likely. Some condoms are coated with spermicide and these should be avoided. Do not use diaphragm for contraception as its use makes urine infection more likely

- ***Use water based lubricants such as K-Y jelly***

If you find your vaginal area is dry -this will minimise vaginal irritation

- ***Empty your bladder after intercourse***

Do not go to sleep without emptying your bladder

- ***Have a few extra glasses of water around the time of having intercourse***

- ***Oestrogen replacement for post-menopausal women***

The reduction in oestrogen after the menopause alters the vaginal tissue and urethra making urine infection more likely. These oestrogens can be replaced with hormone replacement therapy. If this is not a good option for you there are vaginal oestrogen creams and pessaries available. These affect just the vaginal tissue and very little oestrogen is absorbed into the body.