

URINARY TRACT INFECTION (UTI)

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A Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) occurs when bacteria infect the urinary system.. The infection most commonly involves the bladder (termed 'cystitis'), but in complicated cases, may also spread to involve the kidneys (termed 'pyelonephritis'). It is not a sexually transmitted infection.

WHAT CAUSES UTIs?

Most UTIs develop after bacteria from the gut or genital skin spread to the urethra (the opening from which urine is passed). From here, bacteria can easily spread into the bladder or further to the kidneys. (Very rarely, bacteria can spread directly to the kidneys from the blood stream.) UTIs are more common in women than in men because the urethra is very short in women and bacteria can pass more easily into the bladder.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Many people with a UTI will need to pass urine frequently (including overnight) and have urgency to urinate. They will often have a 'burning' sensation on urination. The urine may have an offensive smell, and blood can sometimes be visible in the urine. Lower abdominal pain and tenderness over the bladder may occur. Pain in the flanks (and / or the kidney area) and fever may indicate pyelonephritis.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

UTIs are sometimes diagnosed without tests if the symptoms are very typical. Most times, a mid stream urine sample will be collected. It is examined under the microscope to look for bacteria, pus cells or blood. If present, the bacteria are then grown and tested to see which antibiotic(s) will work to treat the infection. This process can take several days. It is important to see your doctor if you develop symptoms of UTI, so the diagnosis can be confirmed and treated. Other infections can sometimes be mistaken for a UTI.

HOW IS A UTI TREATED?

Firstly, it is important to treat the symptoms to reduce discomfort. Simple pain relief products like paracetamol can be useful and Ural sachets or Citravescent (available from a chemist) can help reduce the burning and stinging sensation. Good fluid intake is recommended, at least 1.5 — 2 litres of water per day.

Secondly, antibiotics are needed to treat the bacterial infection. They are often started prior to receiving the test results, and changed if the tests show a different antibiotic is required. Symptoms usually resolve within 3 days, but some mild discomfort may remain for a few days as the bladder recovers. If pyelonephritis is suspected, admission to hospital and intravenous antibiotics may be required.

HOW CAN UTIS BE PREVENTED?

Various measures can be taken to try to prevent a UTI recurring:

- If UTIs are triggered by sexual intercourse, urinating before and after sex can help remove bacteria from the urethra.
- Wiping away from the vagina after using your bowels.
- Completely emptying the bladder during urination.
- Many people find regular cranberry juice can be helpful in preventing UTIs, however this is medically unproven..

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Urethritis. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.