

Bitesize Guide to:



Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) are the second most common infection in the human body. UTIs are uncomfortable and inconvenient but there are simple and effective ways to treat them. It is important to understand the symptoms of a UTI to receive treatment quickly. This is our bitesize guide to the condition.

What is it?

The urinary tract system consists of the bladder, urethra (the tube which carries urine out of the body from the bladder), kidneys, and ureters (tubes which carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder). A UTI is the infection and inflammation of the urinary tract system, making urination both difficult and painful.

Who gets it?

Women are much more likely than men to have a UTI. About 50% of women will have a UTI during their lifetimes. Women are more likely to get UTIs than men, as a woman's urethra is shorter and positioned closer to the anus than a man's, meaning that bacteria have less distance to travel to the bladder.

Why does it happen?

UTIs usually occur when bacteria get into the urethra and cause infection. These bacteria can then multiply and spread from the bladder up into the kidneys.

Generally, you are more likely to develop a UTI if:

- Your bladder is unable to empty properly. Urine left over in the bladder encourages bacteria growth. Pregnancy or an enlarged prostate (in men) could cause inability to fully empty one's bladder.
- You have kidney or bladder stones. These also cause blockages and the build-up of bacteria.
- You have a weak immune system.
- You use a urinary catheter. This is a tube inserted into the urethra to drain fluid. The catheter's surface can provide bacteria with a place to multiply and a route for the bacteria to enter the urethra.

Diagnosing Urinary Tract Infections

Although it may be uncomfortable to discuss when and how you urinate, urinary infections must be addressed and can be treated swiftly. It is important to deal with a UTI before it potentially spreads to the kidneys, so see your GP if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Feeling the need to urinate more often
- Urinating in small amounts
- Pain or a burning sensation when urinating
- Generally feeling unwell, weaker, and tired
- Pain in your back and sides
- Cloudy, bloody or pungent urine

Treating Urinary Tract Infections

Many UTIs will go away within two to three days. Symptoms can be relieved with basic measures such as taking painkillers and drinking plenty of water to flush out infection.

UTIs can also be treated with antibiotics. As with all antibiotic prescriptions, it is important to finish the full course of medication rather than taking the antibiotics until the infection's symptoms disappear.

If there are complications and your health is at risk, you may need to be treated in hospital. This could happen if you are pregnant, over 60, have kidney stones, or have a weak immune system.

4 Key Facts about Urinary Tract Infections

1. Certain contraceptives can put women at risk of UTIs. These include the diaphragm and spermicide coated condoms.
2. Sexually active women are more likely to get a UTI because sex can irritate and weaken the urethra, making it easier for bacteria to enter.
3. You can help prevent UTIs by keeping hydrated, urinating as soon as possible after sex, and avoiding synthetic underwear.
4. Cystitis is the name given to the infection and inflammation of the bladder. It is the most common form of UTI.

If you think you may have a urinary tract infection, speak to your healthcare professional.

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We want to make sure that our information is helpful to you and value feedback. To let us know your views or to find out the latest from The Urology Foundation visit www.theurologyfoundation.org

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