

URINARY TRACT INFECTION

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



*Compassionate care for
all stages of life*

How common are urinary tract infections (UTIs)?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are common infections. Many women get them at some point in their lives. Some women have repeat infections and may have them often. But most UTIs are not serious. These infections can be treated with antibiotics, and symptoms usually can be relieved quickly.

What is the urinary tract?

The urinary tract has a lower part and an upper part. The upper urinary tract consists of the ureters and kidneys. The lower tract is made up of the urethra and the bladder. The organs work together in the following ways:

- The two kidneys produce urine.
- The two tubes called ureters carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder.
- The bladder stores urine.
- The urethra carries urine from the bladder out of the body.

Where do UTIs start?

Most UTIs start in the lower urinary tract. Bacteria enter through the urethra and spread upward to the bladder. This can cause cystitis, a bladder infection. In some cases, an infection of the urethra called urethritis can develop at the same time.

How does a kidney infection start?

Bacteria that have infected the bladder may travel up the ureters to the kidneys. This can cause pyelonephritis, a kidney infection. An infection in the upper tract may cause a more severe illness than infection in the lower tract.

What can cause UTIs?

It's normal for bacteria from the bowel to live on the skin near the anus or in the vagina. Sometimes these bacteria spread to the area around the urethra. If they move up the urethra, they may cause infections in the bladder and, sometimes, in other parts of the urinary tract.

Do women get UTIs more often than men?

Women are more likely than men to get UTIs. This is because the urethra is shorter and closer to the anus in a woman than in a man. This means bacteria can reach the bladder more easily.

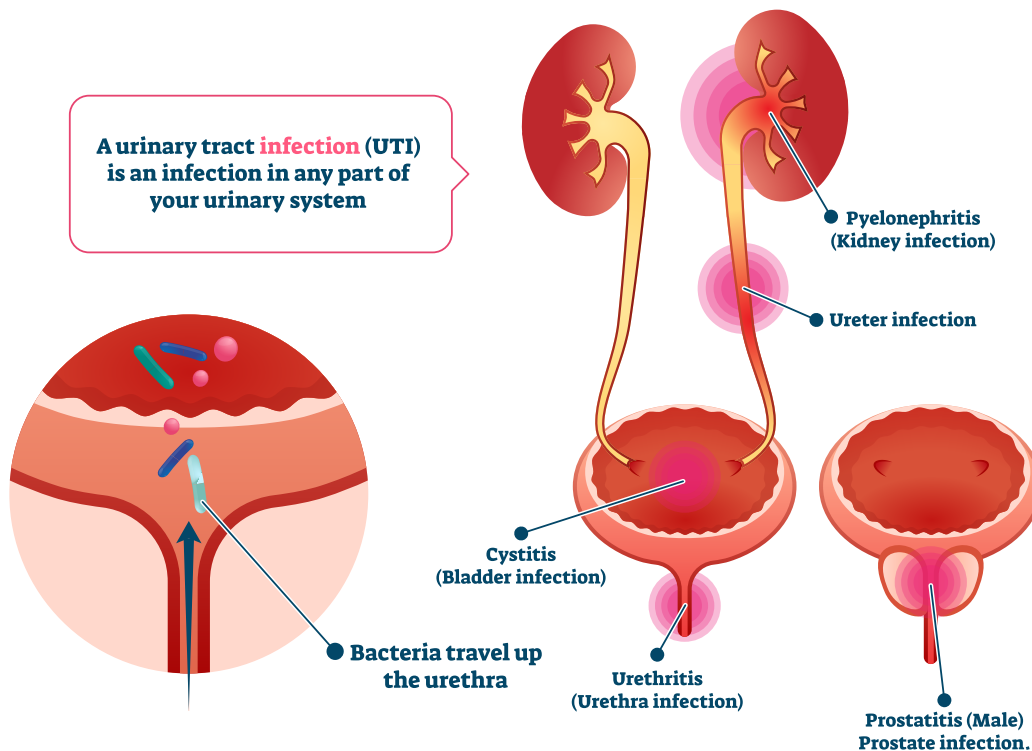
Can I get a UTI from sex?

The anatomy of women makes them prone to getting UTIs after having sex. The opening of the urethra is in front of the vagina. During sex, bacteria near the vagina can get into the urethra from contact with the penis, fingers, or sex toys. UTIs tend to occur in women who begin having sex or have it more often. Using spermicide or a diaphragm for birth control also can cause more frequent UTIs.

What else can cause UTIs?

Infections also can develop when the bladder does not empty completely. This may be caused by the following:

- A stone in the ureters, kidneys, or bladder that blocks the flow of urine through the urinary tract. Stones develop when minerals in urine stick together and there is not enough fluid to flush them out.
- A narrowed tube in the urinary tract that slows the flow of urine.
- A problem with the nerves or muscles of the pelvis.



What other factors increase the risk of getting a UTI?

You are more likely to get an infection if you have had a UTI before, have had several children, have diabetes mellitus, have obesity, are going through menopause, or are pregnant.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

Symptoms of UTIs can come on quickly. One sign is a strong urge to urinate that cannot be delayed (urgency). As urine flows, a sharp pain or burning may be felt in the urethra. The urge to urinate then returns minutes later (frequency). There may be soreness in the lower abdomen, in the back, or in the sides.

How does an infection affect my urine?

If you have a UTI, your urine may have a strong odor, look cloudy, or be tinged with blood. Blood in the urine may be caused by a UTI, but it also may be caused by other conditions. Call your ob-gyn right away if you see blood in your urine.

What are the symptoms of a kidney infection?

If the bacteria enter the ureters and spread to the kidneys, symptoms may include back pain, chills, fever, nausea, and vomiting. If you have any of these symptoms, call your ob-gyn right away. Kidney infections are serious. They need to be treated promptly.

Can my symptoms be something else? _____

Pain when urinating can be caused by other conditions, such as infection of the vagina or vulva. Tests may be needed to confirm the diagnosis of a UTI. Talk with your ob-gyn in detail about your symptoms.

How are UTIs diagnosed? _____

The diagnosis of a UTI often is made based on symptoms, including pain with urination or frequent urination.

A simple test called urinalysis may show if you have a UTI. For this test, you will be asked to provide a urine sample. This sample will be studied in a lab to look for white blood cells, red blood cells, and bacteria. The urine sample also may be grown in a culture (a substance that promotes the growth of bacteria) to see which bacteria are present.

Why would I need more testing? _____

You and your ob-gyn may discuss testing to look at your urinary tract if your infection does not clear up with treatment, if you have had several UTIs in a short time, or if you have pain, fever, and chills.

Your ob-gyn may recommend an ultrasound exam or computed tomography (CT) of the upper urinary tract.

How are UTIs treated? _____

Antibiotics are used to treat UTIs. The type, dose, and length of antibiotic treatment depend on the type of bacteria causing the infection and your medical history. A simple UTI rarely leads to infection of the upper urinary tract.

How do I prevent UTIs? _____

There are a number of ways to prevent UTIs:

- Wash the skin around the anus and the genital area.
- Drink plenty of fluids (including water) to flush bacteria out of your urinary system.
- Empty your bladder as soon as you feel the urge or about every 2 to 3 hours.