



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What You Need to Know About Bladder Infections in Women

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+ WHAT ARE URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are infections that occur within the urinary tract.

The urinary tract consists of the

- Kidneys (which produce urine)
- Ureters (the tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder)
- Bladder (which stores urine).
- Urethra (which carries urine from the bladder to the outside).

UTIs are usually caused by bacteria and occur when these bacteria get into the urethra and spread up into the bladder. If the infection remains in the bladder, it is a bladder infection or lower urinary tract infection (Lower UTI). The infection can also spread up past the bladder and enter the kidneys to cause a kidney infection.

Over 50% of all women will have at least one UTI episode at some point in their lives.

The symptoms of lower UTI or bladder infection include:

- Pain or burning when passing urine.
- Frequent need to urinate.
- Urgent need to urinate, but without passing much urine.
- Discomfort or pain in your lower abdomen.
- Smelly or cloudy urine.
- Blood in the urine.

Some sexually transmitted infections can have symptoms like those of UTI. Therefore, it is important to see a doctor for the correct diagnosis and treatment.

Bladder infections are treatable. However, delaying treatment can lead to serious complications. The

+ WHAT CAUSES BLADDER INFECTIONS?

Bacteria are not normally found in the urinary tract, but they live close to the urethra in women. Urinary tract infections (UTIs) occur when these bacteria get into the urethra and travel up into the urinary tract.

Factors that can increase your risk of developing lower UTI include:

- Being sexually active.
- Having a new sexual partner.
- Pregnancy.
- History of UTI in childhood.
- Passing through menopause
- Having or recently had a urine catheter in place
- Having a weak immune system.
- Poorly controlled diabetes.
- Kidney stones.

+ WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

You should see a primary care doctor as soon as possible if:

- Your symptoms do not improve within a few days.
- Your symptoms come back after treatment.
- You are pregnant and have symptoms of a UTI.
- You are elderly with symptoms of a UTI.
- You are diabetic and have symptoms of UTI.

The following symptoms suggest serious infection and you should see a doctor immediately:

- Blood in your urine.
- Not passed urine all day.
- Fever, shivering or chills.
- Feel confused or drowsy.
- Pain in the loins (upper back).
- Symptoms are getting worse.
- Vomiting.
- Symptoms not improved within 48 hours of starting antibiotics.

+ HOW IS A BLADDER INFECTION DIAGNOSED?

To make a diagnosis of lower UTI your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and check your body. If the symptoms and signs suggest you have UTI, your doctor may order a urine test to confirm the diagnosis.

A urine culture is a test that uses a urine sample to grow bacteria in a laboratory. It can show the type of bacteria that is causing the problem and determine which antibiotics are active against them. It usually requires about 48 hours to get the results.



+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

After confirming the diagnosis of lower UTI, your doctor will start you on antibiotics right away. The symptoms should start to resolve within 1-2 days of starting treatment.

You should complete the entire course of antibiotics, even if you start to feel better.

If your UTI is very serious with fever or you have an existing condition that compromises your immunity such as diabetes or pregnancy, your doctor will refer you to a hospital for admission and treatment. You may need to stay for a few days.

If your UTI comes back any time after treatment, you will usually be prescribed a longer course of antibiotics. If you keep getting UTIs and regularly need treatment, your doctor may refer you to a specialist.

+ TREATMENT

The main treatment for lower UTI is a course of antibiotics. These are usually given as tablets or injections. Your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic that works against the type of bacteria most likely causing your UTI.

The typical antibiotics options are:

- Nitrofurantoin.
- Septrin.
- Fosfomycin.

Do not take any of these medicines without a doctor's prescription. Some people may be allergic to these medications.

Depending on which antibiotic your doctor prescribes, you may need a single dose or up to a 5-day course of antibiotics.

If you do not feel better within 2-3 days after starting the antibiotics or your symptoms become worse, it is important to see your doctor.

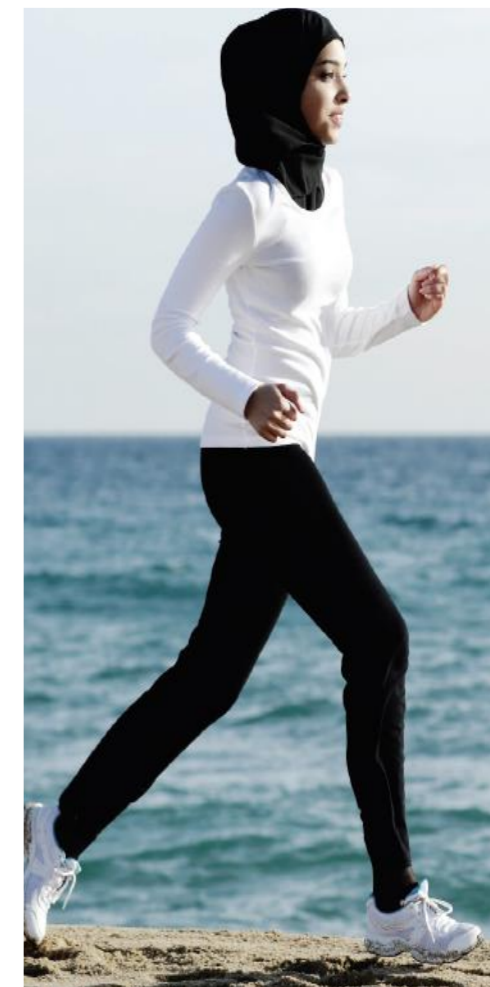
If you have pain, you can take a non-prescription pain-relief medicine like paracetamol or ibuprofen until you see the doctor.



You may need further testing if you keep getting bladder infections despite treatment, especially if there is a chance that a part of your urinary tract is physically abnormal, or you have a kidney stone.

Tests for these conditions usually include imaging tests like a CT (Computed Tomography) scan and ultrasound.

- Changing your birth control method. If you use spermicide or a diaphragm, try to switch to an alternate method of birth control.
- Increase your daily fluid intake.
- Try to urinate before and after sex.
- Always wipe from front to back and clean the outer lips of your genitals daily.
- Vaginal oestrogen. This has some benefit in women passing through menopause.
- Antibiotics. Preventive antibiotics may be recommended if you repeatedly develop bladder infections and did not respond to other preventive measures.



+ FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up testing is not needed in healthy, young women with a bladder infection, if symptoms have resolved.

If you are pregnant, your doctor may ask you to have a repeat urine culture one to two weeks after completing your treatment to make sure the bacteria are no longer in the urine.

ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOUR DOCTOR KNOWS ALL THE MEDICINE YOU ARE TAKING AND WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ANY ALLERGIES

DURING PREGNANCY:

Changes in hormone levels can raise your risk for UTI. Bladder infections during pregnancy are more likely to spread to the kidneys. If left untreated, these can lead to:

- Premature delivery.
- Low birth weight babies.
- High blood pressure, which can lead to a more serious condition called preeclampsia.

+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on how to treat women with lower urinary tract infections can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) Qatar.

The Guideline is available to the public from the MOPH website: www.moph.gov.qa