Understanding Urine Infections

A guide for older people

UTI INFORMATION SERVICE

THE UROLOGY FOUNDATION

Understanding urine infections

What Is a urine infection?

Urine infections, or urinary tract infections (UTIs), occur when bacteria enter any part of your urinary system. Sometimes bacteria are found in a urine test without causing any symptoms this is called ***asymptomatic bacteraemia*** - and usually doesn't require antibiotics. However, severe infections can become serious and need attention. The commonest kind of UTI is a bladder infection or cystitis.

How to prevent urine infections

Stay hydrated: Are you drinking enough?

As we get older, we might not always feel thirsty, so it's important to maintain regular fluid intake. Aim for **6-8 glasses of water daily** to keep your urine a light straw colour

Stay clean and comfortable

Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet.

Keep your genital area clean, using unscented products, especially if you use pads.

Stay on top of constipation as this can affect your bladder and ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice if you are having problems.

Monitor blood sugar levels regularly if you have diabetes, as high sugar levels can increase the risk of UTIs.

Always empty your bladder after sex.

Common signs of a urine infection

Changes in bathroom habits: Increased frequency of urination, strong urge to urinate, or pain during urination. Also, if you feel that you are not emptying your bladder fully.

Appearance of your urine: Urine that is cloudy, dark, or has a strong smell. Sometimes there may be blood present, which can be visible to the eye.

Physical discomfort: Pain in your lower abdomen, high temperature, chills, or nausea.

Generally feeling unwell: You may be unsteady on your feet or feel weak or lightheaded

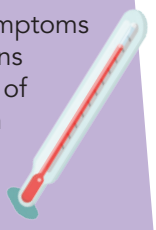
Severe symptoms needing urgent care

- Not passing urine all day
- Severe pain in your back or sides, which may indicate that the infection is affecting your kidneys
- Vomiting, which can prevent you from staying hydrated
- Sudden confusion, unusual tiredness, or behavioural changes, especially in older adults—these can sometimes be the only signs of a UTI

If you have a fixed catheter or use an intermittent catheter

It's important to be vigilant about specific symptoms that may indicate an infection or complications

- **Shivering or shaking -** This can be a sign of high temperature or the body's response to an infection
- **Temperature fluctuations -** Monitor for high or low body temperatures, which can indicate a more widespread response to an infection
- **Kidney pain -** Pain or discomfort in the back just under the ribs can suggest an infection has reached the kidneys
- **Blocked catheter -** If urine is not flowing through your catheter as it should, or if there are signs of leakage around the catheter site, this may indicate a blockage or other issue
  No urine drained on self-insertion needs to be flagged promptly to your nurse or doctor
- **Pain on insertion site -** Discomfort or pain around where the catheter enters the body can be a sign of infection or improper catheter placement. Pain on self-insertion can indicate a possible UTI



What to do if you feel unwell

Keep well-hydrated

This helps to flush out bacteria, even though it may hurt to pass urine more frequently it will help in the long run.

Pain relief

Use over-the-counter medications like paracetamol to manage discomfort and high temperature, making sure you stick to the dosing instructions.

If you're prescribed antibiotics

Antibiotics can help treat UTIs effectively, but they do have side effects and are not always needed. Taking antibiotics when they are not required can lead to *bacterial resistance* (a type of antimicrobial resistance or AMR). This can occur when the bugs that cause infections change in a way that reduces the effectiveness of antibiotics. Always seek advice from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

If you are prescribed antibiotics, always finish the whole course to treat the infection properly even if you start to feel better. This is important to avoid bacterial resistance.

Seek medical advice if your symptoms are not improving after 48 hours.

Watch for potential side effects such as rashes, nausea or diarrhoea and let your doctor know if these symptoms do occur.

When to get help

If something doesn't feel right or if you're unsure about your symptoms, asking for help is always a good idea. Early detection and treatment of UTIs are key to staying comfortable and preventing more serious issues. Catching a UTI early can significantly improve the ease of management and recovery.

Contact your GP or talk to your pharmacist

If you notice any symptoms, especially if they're new or it's your first experience with a UTI, contact your GP or talk to your pharmacist. If you are experiencing frequent symptoms let them know.

What to expect from a consultation

When you consult with a pharmacist, nurse, or doctor regarding urinary tract infection symptoms, you can expect the following:

- **Assessment of symptoms -** They will first evaluate whether your symptoms are likely to improve on their own. Based on this initial assessment, you might receive advice on self-care and over-the-counter pain relief to manage discomfort.

- **Hydration advice -** You will be encouraged to drink more fluids. Staying well-hydrated helps flush bacteria from the urinary tract and can aid in recovery.

- **Antibiotics -** You may be prescribed antibiotics to start straight away or to start taking if you don't experience improvements after trying self-care strategies.

- **Physical examination -** Your doctor or nurse may perform a physical examination, including checking your abdomen for any tenderness, which can help determine whether the infection involves the bladder or kidneys.

- **Monitoring and follow-up -** They will advise you on signs to monitor and when to return if symptoms persist or worsen. This follow-up care is vital to ensure that the infection is fully resolved and to prevent complications.

- **Urine tests -** You will likely be asked to provide a urine sample. This test can help to confirm the presence of an infection and understand which bug is causing it.

- **Urgent help -** If symptoms worsen quickly or you experience any severe symptoms mentioned above, immediate action is necessary: **Call NHS 111** for guidance or to find out if you have severe symptoms and need urgent medical care.

What is a UTI?

A Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) is a common infection that can affect anyone, regardless of age, and involves the urinary system but most commonly the bladder. UTIs are the second most common kind of infection after chest infections.

UTIs can be uncomfortable and debilitating. They can be particularly serious in the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. Early detection and proper management are essential to prevent complications.

What are the symptoms?

UTIs can cause a variety of symptoms, which may include:

- Burning sensation during urination
- Cloudy or strong-smelling urine
- Frequent urge to urinate with little or nothing being passed
- Fever or high temperature
- Feeling generally unwell
- Confusion in the elderly

These symptoms can vary in severity, and early detection is important to prevent complications, especially in vulnerable individuals. UTIs can progress to sepsis, a life-threatening condition. Watch for high fever, rapid breathing, and confusion.

Urgent help - If symptoms worsen quickly or you experience any severe symptoms mentioned above, immediate action is necessary: Call NHS 111 for guidance or to find out if you have severe symptoms and need urgent medical care.

For more detailed information on managing and treating UTIs, please refer to our specific treatment-focused information on our website:
https://www.theurologyfoundation.org/urology-health/bladder-conditions/urinary-tract-infections-uti/

For information on the references we have used and information on further reading please contact nurse@theurologyfoundation.org

Our confidential UTI Information Service is here to help you:

0808 801 1108 **Helpline open Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am - 12 noon**

nurse@theurologyfoundation.org

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www.theurologyfoundation.org

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