

What You Should Know About Urinary Tract Infections

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are more common in women than in men. Usually, appropriate and prompt treatment will quickly clear the infection. It is important to receive treatment for a UTI. If left untreated, UTIs may cause serious complications.

What are the signs of a UTI?

UTIs do not cause symptoms in some women; however, in most cases, symptoms are present. These may include a strong urge to urinate, with a painful, burning sensation while urinating. Though the urge to urinate may be frequent, often only small amounts of urine pass. In a UTI, urine may have a strong odor, appear cloudy, or exhibit a pinkish color that indicates blood in the urine. Some women experience pelvic pain, with pressure above the pubic bone. Sometimes a person feels generally "bad" all over.

If fever is present, it may mean that the UTI has spread to the kidneys. Chills, nausea, and vomiting, as well as back and side pain, might indicate a kidney infection.

Pregnant women with a UTI may be at risk for premature delivery or high blood pressure and should seek treatment immediately.

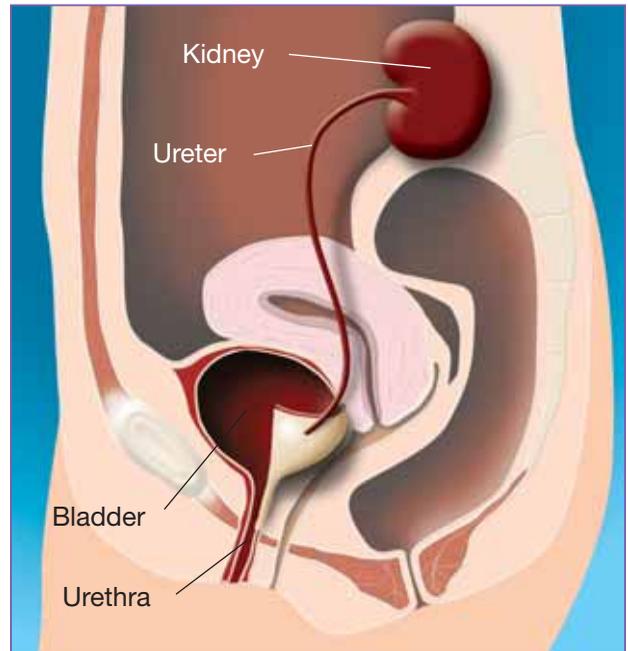
What causes a UTI?

Waste from the body is removed by the urinary system, which is made up of the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra. Though this system is designed to ward-off infection, when the defenses fail, bacteria may invade and multiply. The urethra and bladder are the most common sites of UTIs.

Risk factors for UTI include being sexually active, using diaphragms or spermicidal agents for birth control, menopause, diabetes, smoking, or having blockages in the urinary tract. Patients who use a catheter to urinate are also at risk.

How is a UTI diagnosed?

Initially your clinician will probably get a urine sample from you and order a urinalysis to look for pus, red blood cells, or bacteria. If you have frequent infections, an abnormality in your urinary tract may be suspected. Tests to image your urinary tract include ultrasound, computed tomography; x-rays; and cystoscopy, where a long, thin camera is passed through into your bladder to allow the clinician to see inside.



What treatments are available?

In some cases, an antibiotic can clear the infection within a few days. Your clinician may also prescribe pain medication. For women after menopause, vaginal estrogen therapy may help prevent recurrent UTIs. Severe infections may require hospitalization to receive intravenous antibiotics.

Lifestyle remedies that may also help are drinking plenty of water; avoiding citrus juices, caffeine, and alcohol; and applying a warm heating pad to the abdomen. Pure cranberry juice may have infection-fighting properties.

Can a UTI be prevented?

Lifestyle modifications may reduce the risk for UTIs in certain individuals and include the following: drinking a lot of fluids; urinating frequently; wiping from front to back after urination and bowel movements to prevent bacteria from entering the vagina and urethra; cleansing the genital area after sexual intercourse and emptying the bladder soon after; avoiding feminine sprays, powders, and douches in the genital area; and taking showers instead of tub baths.

To learn more, visit www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov or www.urologyhealth.org.