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## Urinary Tract Infections in Adults

### **What is the urinary tract?**

The urinary tract is the group of organs in the body that handle urine. The urinary tract includes the:

- Kidneys, 2 bean-shaped organs that filter the blood to make urine
- Ureters, 2 tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder
- Bladder, a balloon-shaped organ that stores urine
- Urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body

### **What are urinary tract infections?**

Urinary tract infections, also called UTIs, are infections that affect either the bladder or the kidneys:

- Bladder infections are more common than kidney infections. They happen when bacteria get into the urethra and travel up into the bladder. The medical term for bladder infection is "cystitis."
- Kidney infections happen when the bacteria travel even higher, up into the kidneys. The medical term for kidney infection is "pyelonephritis."

Both bladder and kidney infections are more common in women than men.

### **What are the symptoms of a bladder infection?**

The symptoms include:

- Pain or a burning feeling when you urinate
- The need to urinate often
- The need to urinate suddenly or in a hurry
- Blood in the urine

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### **What are the symptoms of a kidney infection?**

The symptoms of a kidney infection can include the symptoms of a bladder infection, but kidney infections can also cause:

- Fever
- Back pain
- Nausea or vomiting

### **How do I find out if I have a urinary tract infection?**

Call your doctor. Sometimes, they can tell if you have a urinary tract infection just by learning about your symptoms.

Your doctor might do a simple urine test. If they think you might have a kidney infection or is unsure what you have, they might also do a more involved urine test to check for bacteria.

### **How are urinary tract infections treated?**

Most urinary tract infections are treated with antibiotics. These work by killing the germs that cause the infection.

If you have a bladder infection, you will probably need to take antibiotics for 3 to 7 days. If you have a kidney infection, you will probably need to take antibiotics for longer, maybe for up to 2 weeks. If you have a severe kidney infection, it's also possible you will need to be treated in the hospital.

Your symptoms should begin to improve within a day of starting antibiotics. But you should finish all the antibiotic pills you get. Otherwise your infection might come back.

If needed, you can also take a medicine to numb your bladder. This medicine eases the pain caused by urinary tract infections. It also reduces the need to urinate. One such medicine is phenazopyridine which can be obtained without a prescription at the pharmacy. Over-the-counter brand names include "AZO Urinary Pain Relief®," and "Baridium®."

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## **What if I get bladder infections a lot?**

First, check with your doctor to make sure that you are really having bladder infections. The symptoms of bladder infection can be caused by other things. Your doctor will want to see if those problems might be causing your symptoms.

But if you are really dealing with repeated infections, there are things you can do to keep from getting more infections. These include:

- **Avoiding spermicides (sperm-killing creams):** Spermicide is a form of birth control. It seems to increase the risk of bladder infections in some women, especially when used with a diaphragm. If you use spermicide and get a lot of bladder infections, you might want to try switching to a different form of birth control.
- **Drinking more fluid:** This can help prevent bladder infections.
- **Urinating right after sex:** Some doctors think this helps, because it helps flush out germs that might get into the bladder during sex. There is no proof it works, but it also cannot hurt.
- **Vaginal estrogen:** If you are a woman who has already been through menopause, your doctor might suggest this. Vaginal estrogen comes in a cream or a flexible ring that you put into your vagina. It can help prevent bladder infections.
- **Antibiotics:** If you get a lot of bladder infections, and the above methods have not helped, your doctor might give you antibiotics to help prevent infection. But taking antibiotics has downsides, so doctors usually suggest trying other things first.

## **Can cranberry juice or other cranberry products prevent bladder infections?**

The studies suggesting that cranberry products prevent bladder infections are not very good. Other studies suggest that cranberry products do not prevent bladder infections. But if you want to try cranberry products for this purpose, there is probably not much harm in doing so.