

Recurrent Urinary Tract Infections: A Guide for Women

Common questions about managing repeated urinary tract infections

Q What is a urinary tract infection?

A Urine is normally sterile (free of bacteria). A urinary tract infection (UTI) happens when bacteria invade the urine, causing inflammation of the urinary tract and movement of white blood cells (cells that fight infection) into the urine. A UTI often causes symptoms that make urinating uncomfortable. Women develop UTIs more often than men do.

Q What are the symptoms of a UTI?

A The most common symptoms of a urinary tract infection are:

- Pain or burning while urinating
- Frequent urge to urinate
- Feeling the need to urinate but passing only a small amount of urine
- Pain in the lower abdomen

In addition, your urine may appear milky or cloudy and have a foul smell. You may also notice blood in your urine.

Q What should I do if I think I have a UTI?

A If you have symptoms, see your doctor right away. Don't try to treat yourself with cranberry juice or other home remedies. It's important for the doctor to make a diagnosis so the problem can be treated properly. To get rid of the infection, you need to take an antibiotic as prescribed by your doctor.

Q How often do UTIs come back?

A About 25% of women who have a UTI will have another infection within a few years or even repeated infections throughout their lives. Although recurrent UTIs may be annoying, this problem is not life threatening. Each episode of an infection can be effectively managed to kill the bacteria and clear up symptoms as quickly as possible.



If you have the symptoms of a urinary tract infection, call your doctor for an appointment. Getting the correct diagnosis is important for proper treatment.

Q How can I manage recurrent UTIs?

A Your doctor will prescribe a full course of antibiotics for each infection. In addition, you may be prescribed an antibiotic to take to help keep the infection from coming back. Because sexual intercourse can make a UTI more likely, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic for you to take after you have had intercourse. In some cases, your doctor may give you an at-home test and a short course of antibiotics to keep on hand in preparation for a future UTI. When you first notice symptoms of a UTI, your doctor may tell you to test your urine and begin taking the antibiotics. You will then visit your doctor to be sure the infection is fully treated. If all other methods fail, your doctor may prescribe low doses of antibiotics for you to take every night for 6 to 12 months.

Q What can I do to prevent UTIs?

A Using spermicide alone or with a diaphragm can make a UTI more likely to occur, so switching to another form of birth control may be recommended. Urinating immediately after intercourse may help flush bacteria out. Also, because the bacteria that cause UTIs are often found around the anus, try wiping from front to back after using the toilet.