

# Urinary Tract Infections

## Common questions about urinary tract infections and their treatment

**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.

**Q** Who is most at risk for UTIs?

**A** Women are much more likely than men to develop a UTI, especially women between the ages of 18 and 40. It is estimated that at least 10% to 20% of women will develop a UTI at some point in their lives.

**Q** Why are women at greater risk for UTIs?

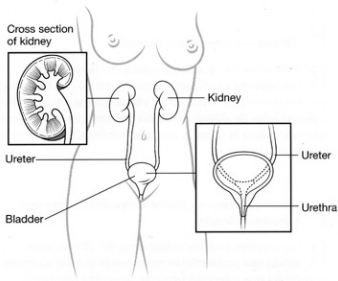
**A** The bacteria that cause UTIs are often present in and around the anus and vagina. In women, the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body) is close to these areas, so bacteria can enter more easily. Women also have a much shorter urethra than men, providing quicker access for the bacteria into the urinary tract.

**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 the urine.



*The urinary tract consists of the kidneys, ureter, bladder, and urethra.*

**Q** How is a UTI diagnosed?

**A** If you have any of these symptoms you may have a UTI. Your doctor can confirm the diagnosis by looking at a sample of your urine under a microscope for bacteria and white and red blood cells, and by growing bacteria from the urine on a culture plate (urine culture).

**Q** How are UTIs treated?

**A** UTIs are treated with antibiotics, which kill the bacteria. To be sure that the bacteria are completely eliminated, it is very important that you take all of the prescribed medication as directed by your doctor, even if you feel better and your symptoms go away. For a UTI, these medications are taken for at least 3 to 7 days. If you stop taking the antibiotics too soon, the infection may come back. In addition, drinking plenty of water (at least 8-9 cups a day) may help flush the bacteria out of your urinary tract.