
URINARY TRACT INFECTION

Urinary tract infection (UTI) commonly refers to bacterial infection involving the urinary system. The urinary system consists of the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra. Its main function is to process and remove liquid waste products from the body. The kidneys filter waste material out of the blood to form urine. The ureters carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder where it is stored. Urine then passes out of the body through the urethra. The bladder and urethra make up the lower urinary tract and are the most common sites for infection.

UTI is more common among women because their urethra is shorter; this allows bacteria to travel easily up into the bladder. Also, a woman's urethral opening is near the anus and vagina, which are significant sources of bacteria.

RISK FACTORS

- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Post-menopause
- Kidney stones
- Enlarged prostate
- Sexual intercourse
- Infrequent and incomplete emptying of the bladder
- Obstruction of the urinary tract

SYMPTOMS

- Pain or burning upon urination
- Frequent urge to urinate but producing little urine
- Blood in the urine; cloudy or strong-smelling urine
- Pain in the lower abdomen, lower back or side (signs of kidney infection)

DIAGNOSIS

An analysis and culture of the urine to detect the presence of bacteria and white blood cells.

TREATMENT

Various antibiotics can be used to treat UTIs. It is important to take the full course of treatment (typically 7-10 days), even after symptoms disappear, to ensure that the infection does not return. Medications are also available which relieve the urgent need to urinate and lessen bacteria in the urine. Drink lots of fluids (at least 8-10 cups a day) to flush out bacteria from the urinary tract. Avoid spicy foods, coffee, tea, soft drinks and alcohol, which can irritate the bladder.

PREVENTION

- Practice good personal hygiene; keep the genital and rectal area clean. Take showers instead of baths.
- After a bowel movement or urination, always wipe from front to back to avoid bringing bacteria from the rectum or vagina forward into the urethra.
- Urinate as frequently as you need to. Do not try to "hold it".
- Drink plenty of fluids (Cranberry juice has been found to be helpful)
- Empty your bladder before and after sexual intercourse (especially for women).
- Wear cotton underwear, which allows better air circulation and discourages bacterial growth.
- Avoid tight fitting pants or pantyhose.

It is important to seek medical attention and treatment for an infection promptly in order to avoid further complications such as kidney infection.