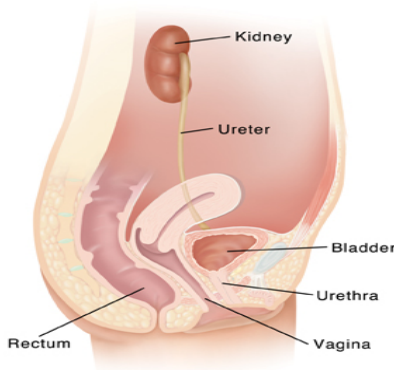


Urinary Tract Infections in Women

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are most often caused by bacteria (germs). These bacteria enter the urinary tract. The bacteria may come from outside the body. Or they may travel from the skin outside the rectum or vagina into the urethra. Female anatomy makes it easier for bacteria from the bowel to enter a woman's urinary tract, which is the most common source of UTI. This means women develop UTIs more often than men. Pain in or around the urinary tract is a common UTI symptom. But the only way to know for sure if you have a UTI for the health care provider to test your urine. The two tests that may be done are the urinalysis and urine culture.



Types of UTIs

- **Cystitis:** A bladder infection (cystitis) is the most common UTI in women. You may have urgent or frequent urination. You may also have pain, burning when you urinate, and bloody urine.
- **Urethritis:** This is an inflamed urethra, which is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside the body. You may have lower stomach or back pain. You may also have urgent or frequent urination.
- **Pyelonephritis:** This is a kidney infection. If not treated, it can be serious and damage your kidneys. In severe cases, you may be hospitalized. You may have a fever and lower back pain.

Medications to treat a UTI

Most UTIs are treated with antibiotics. These kill the bacteria. The length of time you need to take them depends on the type of infection. It may be as short as 3 days. If you have repeated UTIs, a low-dose antibiotic may be needed for several months. Take antibiotics exactly as directed. Don't stop taking them until all of the medication is gone. If you stop taking the antibiotic too soon, the infection may not go away, and you may develop a resistance to the antibiotic. This can make it much harder to treat.

Lifestyle changes to treat and prevent UTIs

The lifestyle changes below will help get rid of your UTI. They may also help prevent future UTIs.

- **Drink plenty of fluids.** This includes water, juice, or other caffeine-free drinks. Fluids help flush bacteria out of your body.
- **Empty your bladder.** Always empty your bladder when you feel the urge to urinate. And always urinate before going to sleep. Urine that stays in your bladder can lead to infection. Try to urinate before and after sex as well.
- **Practice good personal hygiene.** Wipe yourself from front to back after using the toilet. This helps keep bacteria from getting into the urethra.
- **Use condoms during sex.** These help prevent UTIs caused by sexually transmitted bacteria. Also, avoid using spermicides during sex. These can increase the risk of UTIs. Choose other forms of birth control instead. For women who tend to get UTIs after sex, a low-dose of a preventive antibiotic may be used. Be sure to discuss this option with your health care provider.
- **Follow up with your health care provider as directed.** He or she may test to make sure the infection has cleared. If necessary, additional treatment may be started.