

Urinary Tract Infection

Q: What are the symptoms of Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) ?

A: Cystitis causes a frequent desire to urinate. Often only a small amount of urine is passed but there is a burning or scalding pain whilst urinating. It sometimes includes the involuntary passing of a small squirt of urine on coughing or laughing (stress incontinence). Sometimes a little blood is passed in the urine, and affected people often have to get up during the night. Occasionally, there are other symptoms including fever, shivering, pain in the groin and a general feeling of being unwell. This may mean that the infection has spread to the kidneys (Pyelonephritis).

Q: What causes UTI ?

A: Urinary infections are caused by a number of germs. The most common germ is known as Escherichia coli, which normally lives in the bowel without causing harm. The infection may also be caused by other germs, including those acquired during sexual intercourse such as Chlamydia trachomatis, Trichomonas vaginalis, Haemophilus vaginalis or Candida albicans.

Q: How are UTI's treated?

A: Mild cystitis will usually go away by itself within 2-4 days without any treatment. You can use over-the-counter painkillers like paracetamol to help cope with the symptoms but always read the label. More serious forms of urinary tract infection may need treatment with antimicrobial drugs. However, you may need to have some tests to rule out other possible causes before a treatment is prescribed. The drugs Trimethoprim, Nitrofurantoin and Cefalexin are often used to treat urinary tract infections. Other commonly recommended treatments such as drinking more fluid have not been proven. However, drinking at least two litres of plain water each day is generally good for your health. There is no evidence to suggest that cranberry juice is effective in treating urinary tract infections although it may help to stop repeated infections.

Q: How do I stop it coming back?

A: A number of things are believed to help prevent urinary tract infections coming back, although there is little research evidence to support them:

- By drinking a lot of fluid to help 'flush out' your urinary system (drinking at least two litres of plain water every day is generally good for health);
- By deliberately trying to empty your bladder after urinating seems complete ('double urination');
- By urinating after sexual intercourse;
- By avoiding nylon underwear and vaginal deodorants.

