Urinary Tract Infection
Fact Sheet

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SOURCES:

National Institutes of Health

- [Urinary tract infection in adults](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/urinary-tract-infection)
- [What I need to know about urinary tract infections](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/urinary-tract-infections)

US Department of Health and Human Services

- [Urinary tract infection](https://www.hhs.gov/)

National Institutes of Health

- [Urinary tract infections](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/urinary-tract-infections)
What is a urinary tract infection?

- The urinary tract has four parts:
  - Kidneys—collect waste from blood to make urine.
  - Ureters (YOOR-uh-turz)—two tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder.
  - Bladder—sack-like organ that stores urine.
  - Urethra (yoo-REE-thruh)—a tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body.
- A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in part of the urinary tract.
  - A UTI in the bladder can be annoying or painful.
  - If a UTI spreads to the kidneys, it can be a serious problem.

What causes a urinary tract infection?

- Bacteria (bak-TIHR-ee-uh) are a type of germ.
- Normally, urine does not contain any bacteria.
- A UTI occurs when bacteria get into the urinary tract.
- Most often, UTIs are caused by bacteria from the digestive tract.
- The bacteria first travel to the urethra.
- Infection in the urethra is called urethritis.
- Bacteria can move to the bladder and cause a bladder infection.
- Bladder infections are also called cystitis.
- If the bacteria pass through the ureters up to the kidney, they can cause a kidney infection.
- Another name for kidney infection is pyelonephritis (pi-LO-nef-rite-is).
  - Pyelonephritis can be serious. Sometimes people with pyelonephritis need to stay in the hospital for several days.

What are the symptoms of a urinary tract infection?

- Some common symptoms of UTI are:
  - Pain or stinging when passing urine.
  - A strong urge to pass urine.
  - Pressure in the lower belly.
  - Urine that smells bad.
  - Urine that looks milky, cloudy, or reddish in color. If you see blood in your urine, tell a doctor right away.
- Feeling tired or shaky.
- Fever.

**Are there tests for urinary tract infection?**

- Usually two tests are done to check for a UTI.
  - Urinalysis—this test looks for cells and certain chemicals in the urine.
  - Urine culture—this test checks for bacteria in the urine.

**How is a urinary tract infection treated?**

- UTIs are treated with antibiotics (an-tuh-bye-OT-iks).
- Antibiotics are medicines that kill bacteria.
- A health care provider must write a prescription for antibiotics.
- It is important to take all the medicine, even if the symptoms go away before the medicine is gone.
- Many people feel better in one or two days.
- Small infections need three days of medicine. Larger infections need seven days or more of medicine.
- It is important to tell the health care provider about any allergies to medicines.

**Is there a way to avoid urinary tract infection?**

- Sometimes changing daily habits can prevent UTIs.
- If you get UTIs a lot, try these ideas.
  - Drink lots of fluid. Water is best. Try for 6 to 8 glasses a day. Fluid can wash the bacteria from your system.
  - Drink cranberry juice or take vitamin C.
  - Urinate frequently. Go to the bathroom when you first feel the urge.
  - Urinate soon after sex. This can wash away bacteria that might have gotten into the urethra during sex.
  - After using the toilet, always wipe from front to back. This is very important after a bowel movement.
  - Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothes. This helps keep the area dry.
  - Don’t use the diaphragm or spermicides for birth control.
  - Choose lubricated condoms without spermicides. Or use a lubricant (without spermicides).