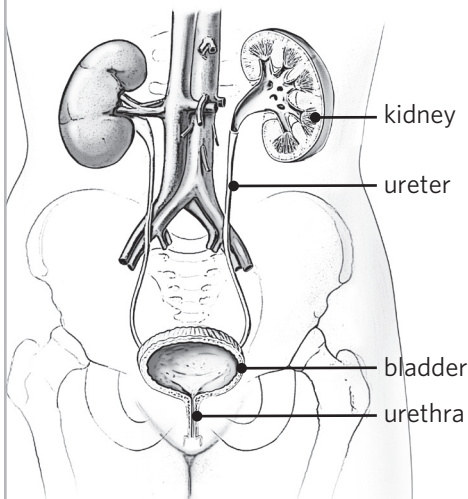


# Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Female Urinary Tract



**If you have a urinary tract infection (UTI), this means bacteria, and sometimes viruses and other germs, get into your urinary tract system.** UTIs are common and usually begin in your bladder or urethra. They can sometimes spread to your kidneys and ureters.

If you're a woman, you're more likely to get UTIs because the urethra is so close to the anus and vagina. This makes it easy for bacteria to get into your urinary tract. And the urethra is shorter in women, so bacteria can travel to the bladder more easily.

## Symptoms

If you have a UTI, you may experience:

- **pressure or pain in your lower abdomen**
- **sharp pain or burning when you urinate**
- **sudden urges to go**
- **going to the bathroom often, but not a lot comes out**
- **feeling like your bladder is constantly full**, even if you've just gone
- **urine that smells unusual or is cloudy**
- **blood in your urine**
- **penis discharge** (in men)

Even if you're treating a UTI, call your doctor right away if your symptoms get worse, you have chills or vomiting, a fever above 100°F, or blood in your urine.

If you have UTI symptoms, don't wait to get treated. An untreated UTI can turn into a more serious infection in your kidneys.

## How You Get UTIs

In women, UTIs can be caused by:

- **Holding your urine**—This can cause bacteria to grow in your bladder.
- **Wiping from back to front, especially after having a bowel movement**—Germs from your anus can easily get into your urinary tract this way.
- **Sexual intercourse**—Bacteria can get pushed into your urethra during sex.
- **Certain methods of birth control**—Diaphragms and spermicides can increase bacteria growth.
- **A weakened immune system**—Stress and health conditions like diabetes can affect how well your body fights infection.
- **Changes in your vagina and urethra during menopause**—Less estrogen can make the protective linings of your vagina and urethra thinner so bacteria sticks more easily.

UTIs in men are usually caused by other conditions, like enlarged prostate or bladder stones, or from long-term use of tubes, called catheters, in the bladder. Catheters can also cause UTIs in women.



To learn more, visit  
**HealthyAdvice.com/  
UTIBasics**

You can also visit these  
websites:

- **American Urological Association**  
[www.urologyhealth.org](http://www.urologyhealth.org)
- **National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse**  
[www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov)

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## Treatment

If you have a UTI, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. Once you start taking antibiotics, your symptoms should go away in a few days. But don't stop taking your medicine once your symptoms go away, or your symptoms may come back. Take your medicine as prescribed.

If you have three or more UTIs in a year, talk to your doctor about preventive treatment. Your doctor may prescribe a low dose of antibiotics that you can take after sexual intercourse, or for one to two days when you have symptoms.

Your doctor might also suggest:

**Pain relievers**—Over-the-counter pain relievers can help ease painful symptoms of a UTI. You can also put a heating pad on your lower abdomen to help you feel more comfortable.

**Drinking water**—Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water to help flush the bacteria out of your system. Avoid fluids that irritate the bladder, like alcohol, citrus juices and caffeine.

## What Can I Do to Prevent UTIs?

**Urinate after sex**—This can help flush any bacteria out of your urethra.

**Avoid irritating products**—Stay away from feminine deodorant sprays or powders and bubble baths. These can irritate your urethra and make it more easily infected.

**Wear cotton underwear**—Other fabrics can trap moisture, so bacteria can grow.

**Take vitamin C**—Vitamin C increases the acid in your urine so bacteria can't grow as easily. Take a daily vitamin, or eat more fruits and vegetables that are high in vitamin C like berries and broccoli. (Check with your doctor to see how much vitamin C you need.)

**Drink plenty of water**—Aim for eight glasses a day. Your urine will be colorless or slightly yellow if you're drinking enough fluids.

**Drink cranberry juice**—It also increases acid in your urine, plus it makes your bladder wall slippery, so bacteria can't stick to it.

## Remember:

- Stay hydrated. Your urine will be colorless or slightly yellow if you're drinking enough fluids.
- If your doctor prescribes medicine for a UTI, take it as prescribed.
- If you have more than three UTIs a year, talk to your doctor about preventive medicine.