

Urinary tract infection (UTI) or Pyelonephritis

Emergency Department factsheets

What is a UTI or Pyelonephritis?

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are a group of infections of the urinary tract. The most common UTI is cystitis, which is an infection of the bladder (where urine is stored).

Other UTIs involve the urethra (urethritis) or kidneys (pyelonephritis). Pyelonephritis occurs when bacteria reach the kidneys from the bladder.

What causes a UTI or Pyelonephritis?

The most common cause of infection is a type of bacteria that normally lives in the bowel (*E.coli*). The bacteria travel up the urethra (the tube that urine passes through) to the bladder. Once inside the bladder, these bacteria quickly grow and cause an infection. Other causes may be related to:

- a blockage in the flow of urine (such as a kidney stone or enlarged prostate gland in men)
- an indwelling urinary catheter (IDC)
- sexual intercourse, especially in women.

Women are more likely to get cystitis than men, as they have a shorter urethra than males. The urethra, vagina and anus are very near each other, making it easy for bacteria to be spread from one to the other.

What are the symptoms?

- Stinging or burning when passing urine.
- Passing very small amounts of urine.
- Feeling the need to pass urine frequently.
- Feeling that the bladder is still full after passing urine.

- Smelly, cloudy, dark or bloody urine.
- Pain low down in the abdomen or in the lower back or sides.
- Feeling unwell with nausea and fever.
- In the elderly it may cause confusion.

Treatment

A urine sample is necessary to test for infection.

Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. After you have been discharged from the emergency department you should take the full course of antibiotics, even if you are feeling better. This is to ensure the infection is cleared.

Urinary alkalinisers (such as Citralite, Ural or Citravescent) can help improve symptoms such as stinging. You can buy these over the counter. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if these can be taken with any other medications you may be taking.

Home care

- Make sure you completely empty your bladder each time you urinate.
- Women should wipe from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Pain medication such as paracetamol may be taken. Carefully check the label for the correct dose and make sure you are not taking any other products containing paracetamol (such as some cough medicines and cold and flu preparations).
- A warm pack (wheat bag or hot water bottle) on your abdomen or back may help relieve pain.

What to expect

While cystitis can be very uncomfortable, it is easy to treat with antibiotics. Antibiotics act quickly and the symptoms may improve within two days, however ensure you take the full course as prescribed.

UTIs or pyelonephritis may become serious if left untreated and can result in kidney damage.

If your symptoms are not getting better, see your local doctor. If infections are an ongoing problem, your local doctor may refer you to a specialist.

Seeking help

In a medical emergency, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000). For other medical problems see your local doctor or health-care professional.

13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) provides health information, referral and teletriage services to the public in all parts of Queensland and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the cost of a local call*.

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