

# Urinary Tract Infection & Bladder Health

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, urinary tract infections (UTI's) are the second most common type of infection in the body, accounting for about 8.1 million visits to health care providers each year. For women, the lifetime risk of having a UTI is greater than 50 percent. A UTI is an infection in any part of your urinary system, including your kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra.

## **Symptoms:**

The signs and symptoms of a UTI can include:

- A strong, persistent urge to urinate
- A burning sensation when urinating
- Passing frequent, small amounts of urine
- Urine that appears cloudy
- Urine that appears red, bright pink or cola-colored (a sign of blood in the urine)
- Strong-smelling urine

Symptoms of a more severe UTI can include:

- Abdominal pain
- High fever
- Shaking and chills
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Make sure to contact your doctor if you experience any of these signs and symptoms, as they can also indicate other more serious conditions.

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## Causes/Prevention:

Urinary tract infections typically occur when bacteria enter the urinary tract through the urethra and begin to multiply in the bladder. When this happens, bacteria may take hold and grow into a full-blown infection in the urinary tract.

Take these steps to reduce your risk of urinary tract infections:

- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water. Drinking water helps dilute your urine and ensures that you'll urinate more frequently — allowing bacteria to be flushed from your urinary tract before an infection can begin.
- Avoid long intervals between urinating. Try to empty the bladder at least every 4 hours during the day while awake, even if the need or urge to void is absent. When feeling the need to empty the bladder, do not try to “hold it”.
- Use good hygiene. This includes always wiping from the front to the back after using the bathroom, taking showers and avoiding prolonged baths.
- Do not wear tight-fitting undergarments made of non-breathable materials. Such fabrics can cause moisture build up and lead to bacterial overgrowth. Cotton underwear for general use is suggested.
- In some cases, drinking cranberry juice or taking cranberry tablets has been shown to prevent UTIs, especially in young women who are at risk for these infections. However, cranberries don't prevent bacteria from growing in the urinary tract; they just make it harder for the bacteria to take hold. Cranberry juice also does not treat urinary tract infections once they have started.

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## **Treatment:**

Doctors typically use antibiotics to treat urinary tract infections. Which drugs are prescribed and for how long depends on your health condition and the type of bacteria found in your urine. Usually, symptoms clear up within a few days of treatment, but in some cases you may need to continue antibiotics for a week or more. It's important to take the entire course of antibiotics prescribed by your doctor to ensure that the infection is completely gone. A severe UTI may require treatment with intravenous antibiotics in a hospital.

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## 9 Tips for a Healthier Bladder:

1. Drink plenty of fluids. Strive to drink enough fluids to pass 2 liters of urine a day, which is roughly eight standard 8-ounce cups.
2. If you're healthy and properly hydrated, your urine should be clear, pale or straw-colored. If it's darker than that or discolored, it could be an indication of dehydration or a more serious health problem.
3. Limit beverages containing alcohol or caffeine. These can cause dehydration, bladder irritation and increased urine production.
4. Avoid chocolate (another source of caffeine), as well as spicy or acidic foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits if they bother you. These are all common irritants to the urinary tract.
5. Use the restroom as soon as you feel the urge to go. Waiting too long can lead to infections.
6. Constipation can negatively affect your bladder health by putting pressure on the bladder, causing the need to urinate more frequently and urgently. For tips on how to help prevent constipation, visit: [www.sdmg.com/userfiles/Constipation.pdf](http://www.sdmg.com/userfiles/Constipation.pdf)
7. Maintain a healthy weight. The heavier you are, the more weight presses on your bladder.
8. Quit smoking. Not only can smoking increase the risk of bladder cancer over the long term, but cigarette smoke and nicotine also act as immediate bladder irritants.
9. Make sure to tell your doctor about any pain you experience during urination, or changes to the frequency, amount, or color of your urine.