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TDD: 1-888-220-5446

# Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

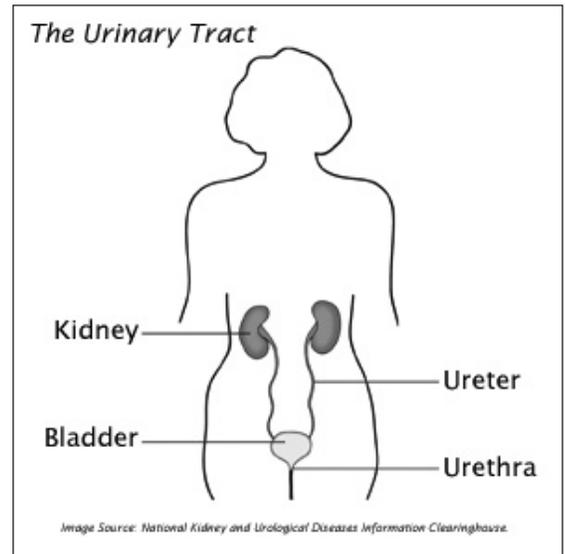
"It was a normal day at work, but I was tired and felt like I had to pass urine the whole day. But when I went to the bathroom, not much came out. When I did pass urine, it burned and smelled bad—and looked cloudy too. These problems lasted a few days. So I called my doctor, and she said it sounded like a Urinary Tract Infection, or UTI. I went to her office, and she asked me to pass urine into a cup. She tested the urine and told me I had a UTI. She called my drug store and ordered pills for me. I took all of the pills she prescribed, and then the UTI and the symptoms were gone."



**Q: What is a Urinary (YOOR-uh-nair-ee) Tract Infection (UTI)?**

**A:** A UTI is an infection anywhere in the urinary tract. The urinary tract makes and stores urine and removes it from the body. Parts of the urinary tract include:

- Kidneys—collect waste from blood to make urine
- Ureters (YOOR-uh-turz)—carry the urine from the kidneys to the bladder
- Bladder—stores urine until it is full
- Urethra (yoo-REE-thruh)—a short tube that carries urine from the bladder out of your body when you pass urine



**Q: What causes Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)?**

**A:** Bacteria (bak-TIHR-ee-uh), a type of germ that gets into your urinary tract, cause a UTI. This can happen in many ways:

- Wiping from back to front after a bowel movement (BM). Germs can get into your urethra, which has its opening in front of the vagina (vuh-JEYE-nuh).
- Having sexual intercourse. Germs in the vagina can be pushed into the urethra.
- Waiting too long to pass urine. When urine stays in the bladder for a long time, more germs are made, and the worse a UTI can become.
- Using a diaphragm (DEYE-uh-fragm) for birth control, or spermicides (creams that kill sperm) with a diaphragm or on a condom. To read more about diaphragms, go to <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/diaphragm-cervical-cap-shield-4244.htm>.



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- Anything that makes it hard to completely empty your bladder, like a kidney stone.
- Having diabetes, which makes it harder for your body to fight other health problems.
- Loss of estrogen (ESS-truh-juhn) (a hormone) and changes in the vagina after menopause. Menopause is when you stop getting your period.
- Having had a catheter (KATH-uh-tur) in place. A catheter is a thin tube put through the urethra into the bladder. It's used to drain urine during a medical test and for people who cannot pass urine on their own.

**Q: What are the signs of a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?**

**A:** If you have an infection, you may have some or all of these signs:

- Pain or stinging when you pass urine.
- An urge to pass urine a lot, but not much comes out when you go.
- Pressure in your lower belly.
- Urine that smells bad or looks milky, cloudy, or reddish in color.

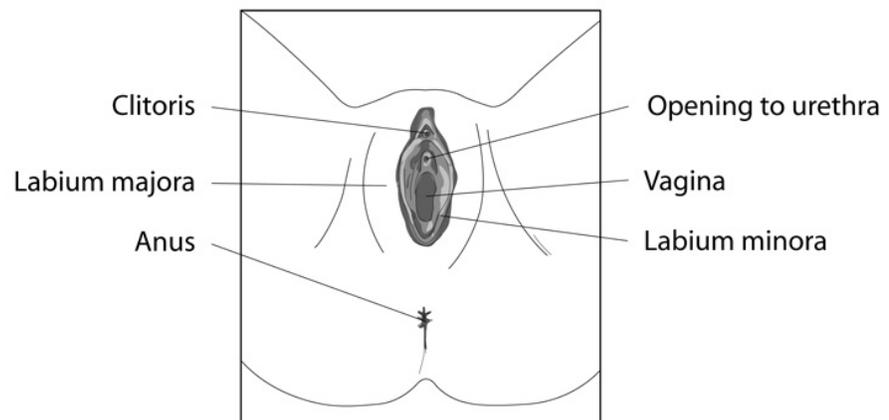
If you see blood in your urine, tell a doctor right away.

- Feeling tired or shaky or having a fever.

**Q: How does a doctor find out if I have a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?**

**A:** To find out if you have a UTI, your doctor will need to test a clean sample of your urine. The doctor or nurse will give you a clean plastic cup and a special wipe. Wash your hands before opening the cup. When you open the cup, don't touch the inside of the lid or inside of the cup. Put the cup in easy reach. Separate the labia, the outer lips of the vagina, with one hand. With your other hand, clean the genital area with the wipe. Wipe from front to back. Do not touch or wipe the anus. While still holding the labia open, pass a little bit of urine into the toilet. Then, catch the rest in the cup. This is called a "clean-catch" sample. Let the rest of the urine fall into the toilet.

If you are prone to UTIs, your doctor may want to take pictures of your urinary tract with an x-ray or ultrasound. These pictures can show swelling, stones, or blockage. Your doctor also





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may want to look inside your bladder using a cystoscope (SISS-tuh-skohp). It is a small tube that's put into the urethra to see inside of the urethra and bladder.

**Q: How is a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) treated?**

**A:** UTIs are treated with antibiotics (an-tuh-beye-OT-iks), medicines that kill the bacteria that cause the infection. Your doctor will tell you how long you need to take the medicine. Make sure you take all of your medicine, even if you feel better! Many women feel better in one or two days.

If you don't take medicine for a UTI, the UTI can hurt other parts of your body. Also, if you're pregnant and have signs of a UTI, see your doctor right away. A UTI could cause problems in your pregnancy, such as having your baby too early or getting high blood pressure. Also, UTIs in pregnant women are more likely to travel to the kidneys.

**Q: Will a UTI hurt my kidneys?**

**A:** If treated right away, a UTI is not likely to damage your kidneys or urinary tract. But UTIs that are not treated can cause serious problems in your kidneys and the rest of your body.

**Q: How can I keep from getting Urinary Tract Infections (UTI)?**

**A:** These are steps you can take to try to prevent a UTI. But you may follow these steps and still get a UTI. If you have symptoms of a UTI, call your doctor.

- Urinate when you need to. Don't hold it. Pass urine before and after

sex. After you pass urine or have a bowel movement (BM), wipe from front to back.

- Drink water every day and after sex. Try for 6 to 8 glasses a day.
- Clean the outer lips of your vagina and anus each day. The anus is the place where a bowel movement leaves your body, located between the buttocks.
- Don't use douches or feminine hygiene sprays.
- If you get a lot of UTIs and use spermicides, or creams that kill sperm, talk to your doctor about using other forms of birth control.
- Wear underpants with a cotton crotch. Don't wear tight-fitting pants, which can trap in moisture.
- Take showers instead of tub baths.

**Q: I get UTIs a lot. Can my doctor do something to help?**

**A:** About one in five women who get UTIs will get another one. Some women get three or more UTIs a year. If you are prone to UTIs, ask your doctor about your treatment options. Your doctor may ask you to take a small dose of medicine every day to prevent infection. Or, your doctor might give you a supply of antibiotics to take after sex or at the first sign of infection. "Dipsticks" can help test for UTIs at home. They are useful for some women with repeat UTIs. Ask your doctor if you should use dipsticks at home to test for UTI. Your doctor may also want to do special tests to see what is causing repeat infections. Ask about them. ■



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### *For More Information...*

For more information on urinary tract infections, please call womenshealth.gov at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

**National Kidney and Urologic  
Diseases Information Clearinghouse,  
NIH**

Phone number: (800) 891-5390

Internet address:

<http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov>

**American Urogynecologic Society**

Internet address: <http://www.augs.org>

**American Urological Association**

Phone number: (866) 746-4282

Internet address: <http://www.urology-health.org>

**American College of Obstetricians  
and Gynecologists Resource Center**

Phone number: (202) 638-5577

Internet address: <http://www.acog.org>

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This FAQ was reviewed by:

Magda Barini-García, MD, MPH

Senior Medical Advisor

Center for Quality

Health Resources and Services Administration

Rockville, MD

Kristene Whitmore, MD

Director, Pelvic and Sexual Health Institute

Graduate Hospital

Philadelphia, PA

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