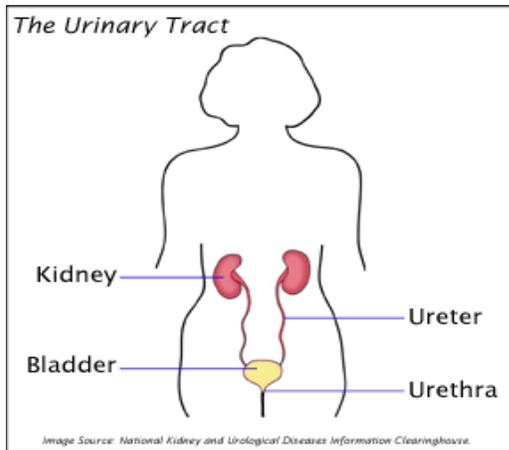




Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

What is the urinary tract?

The urinary tract includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra.



Kidneys remove waste from the blood.

Ureters carry urine (pee) from kidneys to the bladder.

The *bladder* stores urine.

The *urethra* empties the bladder when you pee.

What causes UTIs?

Bacteria cause most UTIs. If bacteria around your vagina or rectum (bum) get close to your urethra, it can cause an infection. Any part of the urinary tract can be infected.

Sexual activity may also cause UTIs. A penis, fingers, or sex toys can push bacteria to the urethra opening.

Diaphragm users may get UTIs more often. Diaphragms can push against the urethra. This makes it hard to empty the bladder completely.

Spermicides or harsh soaps may also cause irritation and increase the risk for a UTI.

What do UTIs feel like?

Some signs are:

- a burning feeling when you pee
- feeling like you need to pee more often (and during the night)
- feeling like you need to pee but not being able to
- leaking urine
- cloudy, dark, smelly, or bloody urine

Other signs include stomach pressure, nausea, lower back pain, or low-grade fever. Signs of a serious UTI (or kidney infection) include high fevers, chills, shivers, lower to mid back pain below the ribs, and feeling ill.

How are UTIs treated?

A healthcare provider will test your urine. If you have a UTI, you may have to take an antibiotic (medicine). Symptoms usually go away in 1-2 days after starting treatment.

Important: Finish all the medicine even if you feel better.

To help prevent UTIs:

- Drink lots of water to flush out bacteria.
- Try not to hold your urine. Pee when you feel the need.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- Pee after having sex to wash bacteria from the urethra.
- Use water-based lubricant for sex.
- Shower instead of tub baths. Avoid sitting in soapy water.
- Avoid douches and scented soaps.
- If you get UTIs often, avoid using a diaphragm or spermicides for birth control.
- Drinking unsweetened cranberry juice may help symptoms.
- Taking a cranberry supplement with water *right after* sex may reduce your risk of getting a UTI.

How serious are UTIs?

Urinary tract infections can hurt. Medicine can keep them from becoming a serious health problem.

Disclaimer: WHC provides health information for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a health care provider.

References:

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (2012). *Urinary Tract Infections: A Common Problem for Some Women*.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health (2012). *Urinary Tract Infection*.

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