Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

What is a UTI?
A Urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the urinary system – the bladder, kidneys, or even the ureters or urethra. They are more common in women, people with diabetes, and more likely to affect the very young or the very old. Also men with prostate problems, and people with catheters or urinary tract abnormalities are at increased risk of developing a UTI.

What causes a UTI?
UTIs are usually caused by bacteria. The bacteria usually enters the urinary tract from the bowel or back passage (anus), via the urethra (the tube from which urine exits the bladder).

UTIs can also be caused by sexually transmitted infections, such as Chlamydia. These can affect both men and women. If one person is diagnosed, their partner(s) will also require testing and treating to avoid re-infection and potentially serious complications.

Where are the different UTIs?
UTIs can be described by the part of the urinary tract which they affect.

Urethritis – inflammation of the urethra.
Urethritis causes pain on urination and the sensation of wanting to pass urine all the time. Often, you will pass frequent, small mounts of urine.

Cystitis – inflammation of the bladder.
Cystitis causes similar symptoms as urethritis, as well as pain in the lower abdomen.

Pyelonephritis – inflammation of the kidney.
Infections involving the kidney are more serious. Most patients with pyelonephritis feel quite unwell. You may experience:
- Fever and chills
- Pain in the loins and/or back
- Nausea and loss of appetite.

Blood in the urine is a common symptom of UTI, and can occur with any type of UTI.

Tests
A mid stream urine (MSU) specimen will be requested. A mid stream sample is best, as the first bit of urine that you pass may be contaminated with bacteria from the skin. Before doing an MSU, wash your hands and ideally your genitals as well.
- Women - hold open the entrance to the vagina (your labia).
- Men - pull back your foreskin. Pass some urine into the toilet. Then, without stopping the flow of urine, catch some urine in the clean (sterile) bottle, provided by a doctor or nurse. Once you have enough urine in the bottle (1/4 to 1/2 full) finish off passing the rest of your urine into the toilet.

Try to avoid touching the inside of the bottle with genitals or fingers.

The results of the MSU take 2-7 days.
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Treatment

Antibiotics are typically used to treat the infection and you should take the full course of antibiotics, even if you are feeling better as bacteria can still be present.

UTIs can be painful but there are some steps you can take to help ease your discomfort:

- Drink plenty of water
- Get plenty of rest to help your body fight the infection
- Make sure you completely empty your bladder each time you urinate
- Use a warm pack, such as a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel, on your abdomen or back to relieve pain.
- Urinary Alkalinisers (such as Citralite, Ural Sachets or Citravescent) can help improve symptoms such as stinging.
- If you have pain take mild painkillers such as paracetamol.

Prevention

UTI in women is often prevented by attention to a few key hygiene steps:

- wipe your bottom front to back after going to the toilet (this reduces the spread of bacteria from your anus to your urethra).
- pass urine immediately after sexual intercourse.
- diaphragms (and some other contraceptive devices) can increase your risk of UTI, so discuss alternative options with your GP.

Other general measures include:

- staying well hydrated – urine should be a clear straw colour, rather than a dark yellow.
- passing urine when you feel the urge, rather than holding on for long periods of time.

When should I see my doctor

You should begin to feel better after 24 hours of antibiotics. See your GP if you are not improving.

Seek urgent attention if you begin to feel more unwell, have fevers or shivering, or feel off your food. This could indicate a more serious medical problem.

You may be asked to see your GP to follow up the results of tests done in the Emergency Department. Your GP can ring for the results of your MSU 2-3 days after the sample was taken.

Instructions:

Seeking help:

In a medical emergency go to your nearest emergency department or call 000.