

# Urinary tract infections (UTIs)

UTIs can affect different parts of your urinary tract.

These include:

- your bladder (cystitis)
- urethra (urethritis)
- kidneys - kidney infection (pyelonephritis)

Most UTIs can be easily treated with antibiotics.

## Symptoms of a UTI

Symptoms of a UTI include:

- needing to pee suddenly or more often than usual
- pain or a burning sensation when peeing
- smelly or cloudy pee
- blood in your pee
- pain in your lower tummy
- feeling tired and unwell
- in older people, changes in behaviour such as severe confusion or agitation

UTI symptoms may be difficult to spot in people with dementia.

## Symptoms of a UTI in children

Children with UTIs may also:

- appear generally unwell. Babies may be irritable, not feed properly and have a high temperature (fever) of 38 degrees Celsius or above
- wet the bed or wet themselves
- deliberately hold in their pee because it stings

See a GP if:

- you're a man with symptoms of a UTI
- you're pregnant and have symptoms of a UTI
- your child has symptoms of a UTI
- you're caring for someone elderly who may have a UTI
- you haven't had a UTI before
- you have blood in your pee
- your symptoms don't improve within a few days
- your symptoms come back after treatment

If you have symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection (STI), you can also get treatment from a sexual health clinic.

[Find STI services - sexualwellbeing.ie](https://sexualwellbeing.ie)

### Ask for an urgent GP appointment if you have:

- pain in your sides or lower back
- a very high temperature or you feel hot and shivery
- felt sick or been sick
- diarrhoea

These symptoms suggest a kidney infection, which can be serious if it isn't treated.

## Causes of UTIs

UTIs are usually caused by bacteria from poo entering the urinary tract. The bacteria enter through the tube that carries pee out of the body (urethra).

Women have a shorter urethra than men. This means bacteria are more likely to reach the bladder or kidneys and cause an infection.

Causes of UTIs include:

- pregnancy
- conditions that block the urinary tract – such as kidney stones
- conditions that make it difficult to fully empty the bladder. These could be an enlarged prostate gland in men and [constipation in children](#)
- urinary catheters. This is a tube in your bladder used to drain urine.
- having a weakened immune system. For example, from [type 2 diabetes](#), chemotherapy or HIV

## Diagnosing a UTI

Your GP will ask you about your symptoms. You may need to give a urine sample to confirm you have a UTI.

A urine test helps to rule out other conditions that might be causing your symptoms.

Men are sometimes offered a painless swab test to check for other conditions. This is where a cotton bud is wiped on the tip of the penis and sent for testing. It won't hurt but may feel uncomfortable.

## Treating UTIs

Your GP may prescribe antibiotics to treat a UTI.

Once you start treatment, the symptoms should start to clear up within 5 days in adults and 2 days in children.

It's important to finish the whole course of antibiotics, even if you start to feel better.

Some people with a severe UTI may be referred to hospital for treatment and tests. You may need to stay for a few days. Hospital treatment is more likely for men and children with a UTI.

## Treating recurring UTIs

If your UTI comes back any time after treatment, you'll usually be prescribed a longer course of antibiotics.

If you keep getting UTIs and regularly need treatment, your GP may give you a repeat prescription for antibiotics.

## Things you can do yourself

Mild UTIs often pass within a few days.

To help ease pain while your symptoms clear up:

- take paracetamol – you can give children liquid paracetamol
- place a hot water bottle on your tummy, back or between your thighs
- rest and drink plenty of fluids – this helps your body to flush out the bacteria

It may also help to avoid having sex until you feel better. You cannot pass a UTI on to your partner but sex may be uncomfortable.

Consult with your GP about taking non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen or aspirin if you have a Kidney infection (Pyelonephritis).

## Preventing UTIs

There are some things you can do to try to prevent a UTI.

## Do

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- ✓ wipe from front to back when you go to the toilet
- ✓ try to fully empty your bladder when you pee
- ✓ drink plenty of fluids
- ✓ take showers instead of baths
- ✓ wear loose cotton underwear
- ✓ pee as soon as possible after sex
- ✓ change your baby's or toddler's nappies regularly

## Don't

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- ✗ do not use perfumed bubble bath, soap or talcum powder
- ✗ do not hold your pee in if you feel the urge to go
- ✗ do not wear tight, synthetic underwear, such as nylon
- ✗ do not wear tight jeans or trousers
- ✗ do not use condoms or diaphragms with spermicidal lube on them. Try non-spermicidal lube or a different type of [contraception - sexualwellbeing.ie](#)

## Natural remedies

There is very little evidence that drinking cranberry juice or using probiotics reduces your chance of getting UTIs.

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