

Overview

Cystitis

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Cystitis is inflammation of the bladder, most commonly caused by a bladder infection.

It's a common urinary tract infection (UTI) in women, and is usually more of a nuisance than a cause for concern. Mild cases will often get better by themselves within a few days.

Some people get episodes of cystitis frequently. They may need regular or long-term treatment.

Cystitis caused by an infection can go on to infect the kidneys, so it's important to get advice if symptoms persist.

Symptoms of cystitis

The main symptoms of cystitis include:

- pain, burning or stinging when you pee
- needing to pee more often and urgently than normal
- pee that's dark, cloudy or strong-smelling
- pain low down in your tummy
- feeling unwell, achy, sick and tired

Symptoms in children include a high temperature, weakness, irritability, less appetite and vomiting.

See your GP if:

- you have severe symptoms, such as blood in your pee, a fever or pain in your side
- you're not sure if you have cystitis

- your symptoms don't start to improve within a few days
- you get cystitis often
- you're pregnant and have symptoms of cystitis
- you're a man and have symptoms of cystitis
- your child has symptoms of cystitis

Your GP should be able to diagnose cystitis by asking about your symptoms. They may test a sample of your urine for bacteria to help confirm the diagnosis.

Causes of cystitis

Most cases are thought to happen when bacteria in the bowel or on the skin get into the bladder via the urethra. The urethra is the tube that removes pee from the bladder and out of the body.

It's not always clear how this happens, but it can be caused by:

- having sex
- wiping your bottom after going to the toilet – particularly if you wipe from back to front
- inserting a tampon or urinary catheter (a tube that empties the bladder)
- using a diaphragm for contraception

Women may get cystitis more than men because their anus is closer to their urethra, which is much shorter. This means bacteria could get into the bladder more easily.

Treatment for cystitis

If you see your GP, you might be prescribed antibiotics. These should start to have an effect within a day or two.

Women don't always need to see their GP, as mild cases often get better without treatment.

If you've had cystitis before and don't think you need to see your GP, ask a pharmacist for advice.

You can also try:

- paracetamol or ibuprofen (check with your pharmacist first if you're taking other medication)
- drinking plenty of water
- holding a hot water bottle on your tummy or between your thighs
- avoiding having sex

Some people use over-the-counter products that reduce the acidity of their pee. There is, however, little evidence to suggest they're effective.

If you keep getting cystitis, your GP may give you a prescription to use whenever you get symptoms.

Your GP can also prescribe a low dose of antibiotics for you to take over several months.

Preventing cystitis

If you get cystitis often, there are some things you can try that could stop it coming back. It's not clear, though, how effective most of the following measures are.

Do

- ✓ go to the toilet as soon as you need to pee and always empty your bladder
- ✓ stay well hydrated – drinking plenty of fluids may stop bacteria multiplying in your bladder
- ✓ wipe your bottom from front to back when you go to the toilet
- ✓ empty your bladder as soon as possible after sex
- ✓ have a shower, rather than a bath – this avoids exposing your genitals to chemicals for too long

Don't

- ✗ do not use perfumed bubble bath, soap or talcum powder around your genitals
- ✗ do not use a diaphragm as contraception
- ✗ do not wear underwear made from synthetic material such as nylon
- ✗ do not wear tight trousers

Drinking cranberry juice is often recommended as a way to reduce chances of cystitis. But large studies suggest it doesn't make a big difference.

Interstitial cystitis

If you have frequent pelvic pain and problems peeing, you may have interstitial cystitis.

This is a poorly-understood bladder condition that affects women of all ages but is less common in men. Unlike cystitis, there's no obvious bladder infection and antibiotics do not help.

If you think you have interstitial cystitis, talk to your GP about how to reduce your symptoms.

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