

Cystitis in women

WHAT IS CYSTITIS?

Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder (the sac that stores urine) and is the most common type of urinary tract infection. It usually occurs when bacteria that normally live in the bowel travel up the short tube (urethra) that connects the bladder to the outside. Once inside the bladder, these bacteria grow quickly.

Cystitis is common in women of all ages. Around 30–50 per cent of women will have cystitis at some time in their lives. A woman is most likely to get cystitis when sexually active, while pregnant and after menopause. The infection cannot be passed to others during sex.

Women get cystitis more often than men because women have a shorter urethra. The urethral, vaginal and anal openings are very close, making it easy for bacteria to be spread from one to the other.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- Stinging or burning when you pass urine.
- Passing only small amounts of urine.
- An urge to pass urine more often.
- Feeling that the bladder is still full after passing urine.
- Smelly, cloudy, dark or bloody urine.
- Pain low down in the abdomen.
- Feeling unwell with nausea, fever and headache (uncommon).

TREATMENT

- A urine sample is necessary to test for the type of infection.
- Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. You should take the full course even if you feel better, as some bacteria may still be active.

- The results of your urine sample should be rechecked with your local doctor to make sure you are taking the correct antibiotics.
- Agents to change the acidity of the urine (alkalinisers) such as Citralite, Citravescent or Ural can help improve symptoms and can be purchased at a pharmacy and some supermarkets. Another option is to take one teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water (250mL) three times a day. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if these are okay to take with other medications you may be taking.

HOME CARE

- Ensure you completely empty your bladder each time you urinate.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Take mild painkillers such as paracetamol for pain if necessary.
- A heat-pack on your abdomen can help decrease the pain. It can be applied for up to 20 minutes every hour, as needed. Check your skin after five minutes; if a rash or irritation occurs, remove the heat pack.

WHAT TO EXPECT

While cystitis can be very uncomfortable, it is easy to treat with antibiotics. They act quickly and symptoms often improve within one or two days.

If symptoms persist, see your local doctor. Cystitis can become serious if left untreated and may lead to a kidney infection and sometimes kidney damage (see 'Seeking help' section over the page).

CAN CYSTITIS HAPPEN AGAIN?

Women who have had one infection are likely to develop another. This is more likely in sexually active women. Recurrent cystitis should be treated early, so see your local doctor if your urinary symptoms return. This is especially important if you are pregnant – an untreated infection may affect the growth of your baby.

If your cystitis keeps coming back, you may need further tests and a referral to a urologist (a doctor who specialises in urinary problems) for further treatment. Some people may need low-dose antibiotics to prevent repeat infections for a period of three to six months, or longer.

PREVENTION

There are some simple measures you can take to prevent further attacks:

- Drink plenty of water.
- Pass urine often, empty your bladder completely and do not 'hold on'.
- Wipe yourself from front to back (urethra to anus) after going to the toilet.
- Use a lubricant during sex. If you are able to, try to avoid using spermicides and diaphragms. You can discuss other forms of contraception with your doctor.
- Pass urine soon after sex.
- Avoid using soap or perfumed products on your genital area.
- Cranberry juice/capsules help prevent infections if taken daily (they stop bacteria sticking to the walls of the bladder). Tell your doctor if you are taking cranberry supplements as they may interfere with some antibiotics.
- Always use a condom if having anal sex and remove it prior to vaginal intercourse. This will

prevent bacteria from your anus entering your vagina and urethra.

Seeking help

In a medical emergency call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

See your local doctor or healthcare professional for other medical problems including:

- severe pain in your back and/or loin area
- fever or chills
- nausea or vomiting
- blood in your urine.

If you are already taking oral antibiotics and you have any of the above symptoms, you need to seek further medical help and possibly intravenous (into the vein) antibiotics.

For health advice from a registered nurse you can call NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day on 1300 60 60 24 for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to interpreting services for callers not confident with English.

* Calls from mobiles may be charged at a higher rate.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional.
- Visit the Better Health Channel at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 9096 7770, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email

emergencycare.clinicalnetwork@safercare.vic.gov.au

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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ISBN 978-1-76069-820-1 (pdf/online/MS word)



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