



### URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

Urinary tract infections (UTIs), often called bladder infections, are a common problem for women. The information in this handout will help you learn what causes UTIs and list some good practices that can help prevent them.

#### What Causes UTIs?

Most UTIs are caused by bacteria (germs) that are normally present in your intestines or on your skin around your anus and vagina where they do not cause harm. About 8 of every 10 UTIs are caused by the bacteria *E. coli*. The bacteria can get into your urethra when you wipe yourself after urinating or when you have sex. They travel up the urethra to the bladder, where they attach to the walls and grow. After 24 to 48 hours, you start to get the symptoms of a UTI.

#### What Are the Symptoms of a UTI?

The symptoms of a UTI include the following:

- Burning or pain when you urinate
- A feeling of pressure in your bladder
- A feeling like you have to urinate, but when you try, there is little or no urine
- Cloudy urine
- Bad smelling urine

#### Is a UTI a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)?

UTIs are not STDs because you do not get the bacteria from your partner. However, having sex is one of the most common ways the bacteria are moved from the skin around your anus and vagina forward to the urethra. Having sex can also cause a little bruising of your urethra, which may make you feel like you have a UTI. Bruising in the urethra can make it easier for bacteria to travel up the urethra into the bladder.

#### Why Am I More Likely to Get a UTI If I Am Pregnant?

- Pregnancy makes the urethra and bladder more relaxed (open) and easier for bacteria to enter.
- Pregnancy makes your immune system act slower.
- During pregnancy, women often have a small amount of urine in the bladder even after urinating, which can help bacteria grow.

#### What Is Asymptomatic Bacteriuria?

Health care providers often test a urine sample early in pregnancy to see if you have bacteria in your bladder. "Asymptomatic bacteriuria" is the name used when you have bacteria in the bladder but no pain or problems urinating. About 1 of every 4 women with asymptomatic bacteriuria in pregnancy will go on to have a painful UTI. A few will get kidney infections—a serious infection during pregnancy. Asymptomatic bacteriuria increases your risk of having preterm labor. If you have asymptomatic bacteriuria during pregnancy, your health care provider will give you a prescription for an antibiotic. Fortunately, there are several antibiotics for UTIs that are safe to take during pregnancy.



From the National Women's Information Center.

### Preventing a UTI

- Drink lots of water every day (6–8 glasses per day). This helps flush out your bladder.
- Urinate several times each day (every 2 hours). Don't hold urine in when you feel the urge to urinate; go right away. When you urinate often, the bacteria don't have time to "stick" to the wall of your bladder and begin growing.
- Urinate soon (within 30 minutes) after having sex. This helps flush out any bacteria that may have been moved up to your urethra. It may also help to use a water-based vaginal lubricant when you have sex. This can help to avoid bruising of your urethra.
- Wipe from FRONT to BACK after urinating or having bowel movements. This will help keep bacteria away from your urethra (See Picture).
- Eat well, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly. A healthy body will have a stronger immune system. This will help you avoid all kinds of infections, including UTIs.
- Drink cranberry juice. Drink 1 glass of cranberry juice, or take a cranberry tablet (available in most stores) every 8 hours. Cranberry juice helps by making it hard for bacteria to stick to the lining of your bladder. Cranberry juice may help prevent UTIs, but it is not helpful once you have a UTI.
- Antibiotics: If your health care provider gave you a prescription for antibiotics to treat a UTI, be sure to take ALL of the medicine! If you skip pills or only take some of the medicine, you may get another UTI that is more serious than the first one.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Women's Health Information Center

<http://www.4woman.gov/faq/Easyread/uti-etr.htm#6>

National Institute of Health, "Urinary Tract Infections in Adults"

<http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/utiadult/>

American Pregnancy Association web site

<http://www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancycomplications/utiduringpreg.html>

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