



## Preventing Urinary Tract Infections

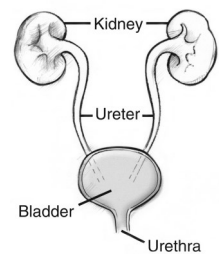
*BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision making or medical advice.*

### Intended Outcomes

Readers will understand risks for urinary tract infections, prevention and treatment.

### Definition

**Urinary Tract Infections:** A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in any part of your urinary system — your kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra. Most infections involve the lower urinary tract — the bladder and the urethra.



### Risks

- Women have a shorter urethra than a man does, which shortens the distance that bacteria must travel to reach the bladder.
- Urinary tract abnormalities. Abnormalities that don't allow urine to leave the body normally or cause urine to back up in the urethra.
- Diabetes, which causes increased sugars in the urine, or other immune issues.
- Not totally emptying the bladder, which can cause urine to be stagnant and bacteria to grow.
- Being immobile for prolonged periods of time.
- Frequent incontinence of diarrhea if someone is incontinent or improper cleansing of area.
- Bladder or uterine prolapse (drooping) due to inadequate emptying of the bladder (postmenopausal women).
- Catheter use. People who can't urinate on their own and use a tube (catheter) to urinate have an increased risk of UTIs. This may include people who are hospitalized, people with neurological problems that make it difficult to control their ability to urinate and people who are paralyzed.



### UTI Symptoms

Symptoms of UTIs can vary depending upon which part of the urinary tract are affected. Although not always present, signs and symptoms of urinary tract infections may include:

- A strong, persistent urge to urinate
- A burning sensation when urinating
- Passing frequent, small amounts of urine
- Urine that appears cloudy
- Urine that appears red, bright pink or cola-colored — a sign of blood in the urine
- Strong-smelling urine
- Pelvic pain in women; rectal pain in men
- Fever

You should call a doctor if you or an individual you care for shows signs of having a UTI. If left untreated, UTIs can cause serious complications.



**UTIs are among the most common infections in the elderly and those with an intellectual disability, but the symptoms may be a little different. Symptoms can include lethargy, falling, incontinence, increased appetite, and decreased mobility. Additional symptoms can include agitation, delirium (sudden severe confusion, sometimes including hallucinations and hyperactivity) and other behavioral changes. These groups are also more likely to develop serious complications as a result of UTIs.**

### Treatment

A simple UTI can be treated with a short term course of antibiotics. However some may need treated for several weeks depending on the severity of the infection or the bacteria causing it. The full prescription of antibiotic needs to be taken, unless they have a serious side effect or allergic reaction, or the infection will return and may be more difficult to treat.

The health care provider may recommend drinking lots of fluids and encouraging the individual to empty their bladder frequently to help flush out the bacteria.

A repeat urine sample after treatment may be ordered to assure infection is gone.



### Complications

When treated promptly and properly, lower urinary tract infections rarely lead to complications. But left untreated, a urinary tract infection can have serious consequences.

Complications of an untreated UTI may include:

- Permanent kidney damage
- Stricture (urethral narrowing) in men from recurrent urethritis
- Sepsis, a potentially life-threatening complication of an infection

### Prevention

- Unless on fluid restrictions, drink plenty of liquids, especially water. Drinking water helps dilute urine and ensures that you'll urinate more frequently — allowing bacteria to be flushed from your urinary tract before an infection can begin.
- Wipe from front to back. Doing so after urinating and after a bowel movement helps prevent bacteria in the anal region from spreading to the vagina and urethra.
- Avoid holding urine for prolonged periods of time; this stretches the bladder. Empty the bladder as soon as the need arises.
- Empty your bladder soon after intercourse. Also, drink a full glass of water to help flush bacteria.
- Drink cranberry juice. Although studies are not conclusive that cranberry juice prevents UTIs, it is likely not harmful.

As a caregiver, you can help individuals avoid constipation, which may cause urine to remain in the bladder for prolonged periods of time, by reminding individuals to drink water and helping them to be more active, if possible.

You can also observe urine for color, odor, volume and sediment - especially in those individuals who are more susceptible to UTIs.

### Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:



1. True or False. Urinary tract infections typically occur when bacteria enter the urinary tract through the urethra and begin to multiply in the bladder.
2. True or False. Men are more likely to get urinary tract infections.
3. True or False. Drinking a lot of water, if not restricted, can help prevent urinary tract infections.
4. True or False. People should never hold their urine for long periods of time as it allows bacteria to grow.
5. The following are often symptoms of a urinary tract infection:
  - A. Strong smelling urine
  - B. A strong, persistent urge to urinate
  - C. A burning sensation when urinating
  - D. Cloudy or colored urine
  - E. All of the above.

## References

Urinary Tract Infections. Mayo Clinic: Patient Care and Education retrieved 5/3/2021 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/urinary-tract-infection/symptoms-causes/syc-20353447>

Urinary Tract Infections. Milestone Centers, Inc: Home Study Trainings retrieved 5/3/2021 from <https://milestonepa.org/health-care-quality-units/milestone-hcqu-northwest/home-study-trainings>

## Learning Assessment Answers

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. E