

## How can you help prevent Cystitis?

There is no proven way to prevent urinary infection but you may find some of the following suggestions helpful:

- Drink plenty of liquids to flush bacteria from your system.
- Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to be taken either continuously in low dosage intermittently at the first signs of infection or at special times of high risk (e.g. sexual intercourse).
- Your doctor may prescribe intravaginal oestrogen therapy since it has been shown to decrease vaginal bacteria and prevent UTI in post-menopausal women.
- Consume cranberry juice drink with a minimum 25% cranberry juice content.

Research published in the British Medical Journal showed that consumption of a cranberry fruit drink reduced the recurrence of cystitis in women by 50%.<sup>1</sup>

Another study indicated that drinking two glasses daily of a cranberry fruit drink (which contains at least 25% cranberry juice) could reduce the potential for the development of cystitis, thus decreasing the need for antibiotics.<sup>2</sup>

- Urinate when you feel the urge; don't let your bladder become overfull and try to empty your bladder completely.
- After urinating, wipe from the front to the back to avoid spreading bacteria from the back passage.
- Drink water before and after sex so you may eliminate any bacteria that may enter the bladder.
- Avoid tight clothing and nylon panty hose which may irritate your body, trap heat and promote bacterial growth. Wear cotton underwear.

<sup>1</sup> British Medical Journal, June 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of American Medical Association, June 2002.

# Cystitis



This leaflet was written in collaboration with the Department of Urogynaecology, The Mercy Hospital Melbourne.

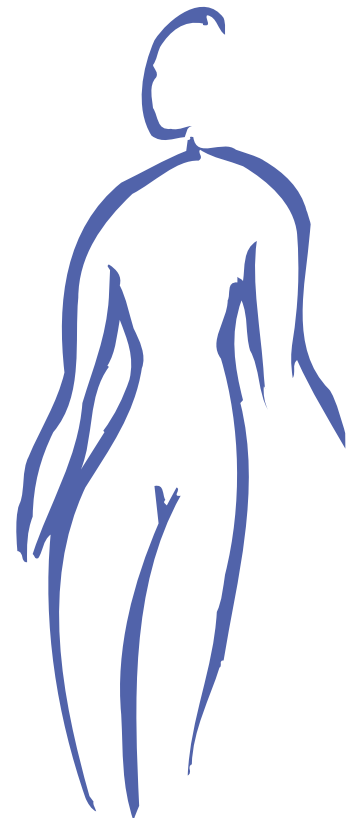


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# Answering your questions about Cystitis

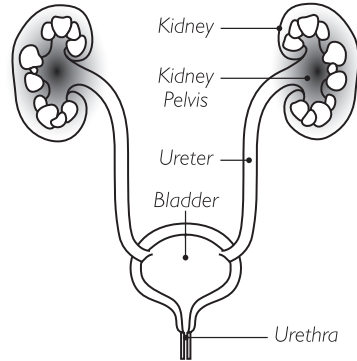
## Urinary Tract Infection



## What is Cystitis?

*The word Cystitis means bladder inflammation.*

In most cases it is caused by urinary infection which can result in inflammation, swelling and severe pain in the urinary tract and, if untreated, kidney infection and damage.



### *Did you know that...*

Urinary infection is common particularly in women, who have a 30% chance of suffering cystitis at some stage of their lives. Middle aged women and the elderly are most at risk.

### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

- A frequent urge to pass urine coupled with a burning sensation

### **Sometimes there may be:**

- Lower back or abdominal pain
- Cloudy urine
- Strong smell
- Blood in the urine

If these symptoms persist beyond 24 hours you should see a doctor. A more serious kidney infection could develop if the condition is left untreated.

Conditions other than cystitis can cause similar symptoms including vaginal infection, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, irritable bladder and bladder cancer. Also bladder inflammation without infection can cause severe bladder pain which could mean you have interstitial cystitis.

## What causes Cystitis?

The healthy bladder is safeguarded from bacterial infection by a protective membrane and by regular emptying of urine, which is normally free of bacteria.

By far the most common urinary tract infection occurs when bacteria such as Escherichia Coli (E. Coli) travel from the rectum to the bladder via the urethra.

**Urinary infection is more common in women because the female urethra (the tube from the bladder) is shorter than in males. The opening of the urethra is close to the vagina and the anus (back passage), making it easier for the bacteria to work their way up the short urethra into the bladder.**

### *Do men suffer from Cystitis?*

Yes though much less often than women. Urinary infections in a man are often caused by an enlarged prostate gland, which can block the flow of urine.

### *Ways in which bacteria can be transmitted include:*

- **Sexual activity**  
Bacteria may be carried from the anal-vaginal area to the urethra and into the bladder through sexual intercourse. This may cause bruising or inflammation to the urethra – a condition known as ‘honeymoon cystitis’.
- **Tampons**  
Bacteria can be carried when tampons are inserted.
- **Toilet Hygiene**  
Wiping from back to the front after going to the toilet can enable bacteria to get into the bladder.
- **Some types of contraception**  
Such as the cap, diaphragm or spermicides.
- **Perfumed toiletries**  
May act as an irritant.
- **A low fluid intake**  
Makes the urine concentrated which may act as an irritant.

### *Other causes may include:*

- **Menopause**  
During menopause, reduced oestrogen levels cause thinning of the lining in the vagina, bladder and urethra, and increase vaginal bacteria. This may lead to infection.
- **Pregnancy**  
During pregnancy, infection occurs more frequently in the bladder and kidneys because of the enlarged uterus and pregnancy-related hormonal changes. If left untreated urinary infections can harm both mother and foetus.
- **Anatomical Problems**  
A small percentage of women may have an anatomical problem including urinary and bowel incontinence that would predispose them to urinary infections. For further information about urinary/ bowel incontinence, contact the National Continence Foundation of Australia Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.

## How do you treat Cystitis?

Firstly, your doctor will ask about your symptoms and test your urine to confirm whether you have an infection.

If a urinary tract infection is present, your doctor will prescribe a course of antibiotics which you should finish completely even though the symptoms may have subsided or disappeared within a few days.

You may be given a course of 1-3 days if this is your first infection. However taking antibiotics for 7-10 days is usual for recurrent infections. Your doctor may also prescribe a simple painkiller such as aspirin or paracetamol for the pain.

### **There are several other steps you can take to make yourself more comfortable:**

- Drink 1.5-2 litres of water per day to help flush the infection out of your system.
- Avoid caffeine, acid foods, spices, citrus fruits, tomatoes, alcohol and chocolate as these foods may increase your discomfort.

Always check with your doctor if symptoms persist beyond 24 hours. Fever, chills, nausea and vomiting and pain in the mid back may indicate a kidney infection. If you have these symptoms you should see your doctor immediately.