

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

- **What Are Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)?**

UTIs are infections in the urinary system, including the

- bladder — the organ that collects and stores urine
 - ureters — the tubes that lead from the kidneys to the bladder
 - urethra — the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body
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Even though UTIs are very common, they should be taken seriously. Severe cases of urinary tract infections, left untreated, may cause kidney infection.

What Are the Symptoms of a UTI?

While not everyone with a urinary tract infection (UTI) will notice symptoms, common symptoms include

- burning pain during urination
 - an urge to urinate when your bladder is nearly empty
 - feeling like you need to urinate all the time, especially at night
 - difficulty controlling when you urinate
 - lower abdominal pain or back pain
 - blood and/or pus in your urine
 - fever
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Be aware that these symptoms are not always caused by a UTI. Other infections, such as [sexually transmitted infections](#), may cause burning during urination and frequent urination. Only a health care provider can tell for sure if you have a UTI. Make an appointment with your health care provider to get the correct testing and treatment.

What Causes UTIs?

It is pretty easy to get a urinary tract infection (UTI). Anything that brings bacteria in contact with the vulva and/or urethra can cause a UTI. This can happen when tiny bits of [feces](#) enter the urethra during sex play or even when toilet water back splashes. Unprotected anal intercourse is a very high-risk behavior for urinary tract infections.

UTIs can also be caused by STDs. When a UTI is caused by an STD, the infection is most often only in the urethra — not the bladder.

If you are not sure how you got your UTI, don't worry. Because bacteria can so easily find its way into the urethra, it's very common for women to have UTIs without knowing the cause of the infection.

Why Are Women More Likely Than Men to get UTIs?

You may have heard that urinary tract infections affect women more often than men. It's true — and the reason has to do with biology.

A woman's urethra is much shorter than a man's, making it easier for bacteria to get into the bladder.

In addition, a woman's urethra is closer to her anus than a man's is. This makes it easier for bacteria to spread into her urethra and cause an infection.

How Do I Get Tested for a UTI?

A health care provider can do a test to see if you have a urinary tract infection (UTI). Your provider will test a sample of your urine.

There are also home tests available at your local drugstore. Home tests contain specially treated plastic strips that you hold in a sample of your urine. If the end of the strip changes color, you may have a urinary tract infection. If the test shows you may have a UTI, see a health care provider right away — you will need treatment.

If you have UTI symptoms and a home test does not indicate an infection, you should still see a health care provider right away. You

may actually have a UTI, or you may have another infection that needs treatment.

Is There a Treatment for UTIs?

Yes. A urinary tract infection (UTI) is easy to treat. Treatments for urinary tract infections include

- antibiotics — These drugs get rid of the infection.
 - over-the-counter pain relievers such as Uristat — These drugs may relieve painful symptoms but will not cure the UTI.
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Make sure you take all of the antibiotics that were prescribed — even if you don't feel any more symptoms.

Where Can I Get a Test or Treatment for a UTI?

Your local [Planned Parenthood health center](#), many other clinics, and private health care providers offer tests and treatment for urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Can I Prevent UTIs?

If you've ever had a urinary tract infection (UTI), you know that once is more than enough. The good news is you may be able to prevent UTIs. Try these simple tips to prevent getting a urinary tract infection:

- Drink when you are thirsty.
 - Urinate as soon as you feel the urge. Don't hold it.
 - Keep your vulva clean and dry.
 - Drink unsweetened cranberry juice or take cranberry supplements. Cranberries contain an acid that helps prevent bacteria from growing.
 - Urinate immediately before and after sex.
 - Avoid positions during sex that seem to trigger UTIs.
 - Use latex or female condoms during vaginal intercourse.
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If you are susceptible to frequent UTIs, you may want to talk to your health care provider to see if there are any other reasons for the infections. Your provider may be able to provide antibiotics to help prevent a recurring infection.
