



Bladder infections in women

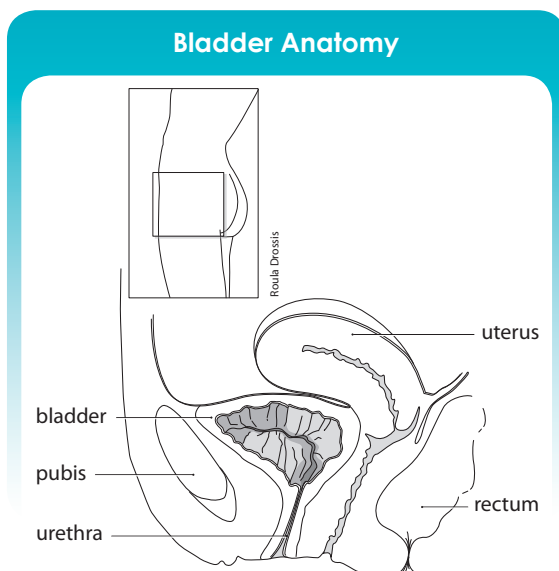
It is common for women to get bladder infections but they are often easy to treat. These infections don't usually become serious problems.

What does the bladder do?

- The bladder holds urine made by the kidneys and delivered through the ureters.
- Messages from nerves in your brain and spinal cord let you know when to empty your bladder.
- When your bladder is full, bladder muscles squeeze to push urine into the urethra. (See diagram: *Bladder Anatomy*)

What is a bladder infection?

- About 5% of women have bladder infections each year.
- Bladder infection (called cystitis when there is inflammation):
 - Is often easy to treat.
 - Usually comes on quickly.
 - Can be painful.
 - Causes you to feel that you need to urinate all of a sudden.



How do I know if I have a bladder infection?

- Mild symptoms include:
 - Pain, burning or stinging when you urinate.
 - Feeling as if you need to urinate again soon after going to the toilet.
 - Urine that's dark, cloudy or has a bad smell.
- More serious symptoms include:
 - Severe pain in your lower back near your ribs or lower abdomen.
 - Vomiting and nausea
 - Fever
 - If you do have these symptoms, you may have a more serious kidney infection.
 - For more information see section: *When is it important to see my doctor?*

What causes bladder infections?

- It is normal for many kinds of bacteria to grow in the bowel, the vagina and on the skin.
- Usually, the bladder and urine are free of germs and bacteria.
- Bacteria can get into the bladder through the urethra and cause a bladder infection.
- Once in a while, you may not have any symptoms even if bacteria are growing in your bladder.
- Without symptoms, you usually do not need to be treated.

Why do women get bladder infections more often than men?

- Women have a shorter urethra so bacteria can get into the bladder more easily. (See diagram: *Bladder Anatomy*)
- Bacteria may also enter when you have sexual intercourse.
- It is important to understand that you do **not** pass bacteria causing bladder infection to your sexual partners.

Are there other problems that feel like a bladder infection?

- If you have inflammation (redness, swelling, soreness) in the bladder, urethra or vagina:
 - You may also have problems with urinating like a bladder infection.
 - You may also feel discomfort when you urinate.
 - Your symptoms will come on slowly, not quickly.
- Vaginal infections often have milder symptoms such as:
 - Itching.
 - Fluid or mucus from your vagina.
 - Uncomfortable sex.

How is a bladder infection diagnosed?

- The diagnosis of a bladder infection depends on:
 - Your symptoms.
 - Bacteria or signs of inflammation in your urine.
 - The way your symptoms react to treatment (such as if antibiotics work).
- A urine test is very important.
 - You can get quick results right in your doctor's office (urinalysis).
 - It may show that there is inflammation.
 - It **cannot** tell what type of bacteria is causing infection.
- To confirm a diagnosis of bladder infection:
 - Your doctor needs to identify the specific bacteria.
 - Your urine test must sit in a lab for 2-3 days to identify the bacteria (called a urine culture).
- It is possible that testing may still not provide definite results.

What is the treatment for bladder infection?

- Many times, a bladder infection will cure itself without medication.
- Taking antibiotics for a short period of time:
 - Will cure your bladder infection faster.
 - Will reduce your symptoms.
 - Is usually taken for fewer than five days.
- Long-term antibiotics cost more and have more side effects.

Will my bladder infection come back?

- Many women get another bladder infection within one year.
- A repeat bladder infection is often unpredictable.
- Your lifestyle and personal cleanliness do not usually cause bladder infections.

How can I help prevent bladder infections?

- Drink enough fluids (preferably water).
- Empty your bladder regularly as it helps to flush out any bacteria.
- Natural or alternative ways may help to reduce your risk of bladder infections, such as:
 - Taking cranberry or vitamin C to lower the acid level in your urine.
 - Eating yogurt with "active cultures."
- It is important to know that the benefit of some natural or alternative ways may not yet be scientifically proven.
- Diaphragms and spermicides for birth control may increase your risk of bladder infection.
 - It may help if you urinate right after sexual activity (*but avoid vaginal douches*).
- After menopause, estrogen replacement may reduce your risk (ask your doctor about this).
- Low doses of antibiotics may be taken up to several months to help prevent bladder infections.

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Is it possible for me to treat a bladder infection myself?

- If you keep getting bladder infections:
 - It is unlikely that you will need more urine cultures or other tests like x-rays or bladder exams (cystoscopy).
 - You may be able to treat yourself with antibiotics that are prescribed ahead of time.
- If your bladder infection seems to happen when you have sex, it may be helpful to:
 - Take a single dose of antibiotic just after sexual activity **OR**
 - Take a single dose of antibiotic at the time of sexual activity.
- Taking some of the above steps may help stop your infection from becoming a regular problem.

When is it important to see my doctor?

- Can see blood in your urine.
- Have a fever.
- Are vomiting.
- Have pain in the area between your ribs and hips (flank).
- Still have bladder symptoms after treatment.
- Regularly have infections.

Bottom Line

- Bladder infections in women are common and usually not hard to diagnose.
- There is treatment that will quickly relieve your symptoms.
- Treatment will let you get back to your to normal life.

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