



Self-help information for women with cystitis

Information about bladder infections

You have this leaflet because you have bladder infections that keep coming back. We call this cystitis. The aim of this leaflet is to give you information about what this involves. Expert doctors in the UK have written it. Please also remember the advice your own doctor or nurse has already given you.

Key points

- Cystitis happens often in women. This is because tiny germs from your bowel can easily get into your urethra. This is the place where pee leaves your body.
- It can sometimes start after sex.
- Some women feel like they have cystitis, but there is no infection.
- There are simple things you can do to feel better without needing medicine.
- Most people do not need special tests.
- If your doctor gives you antibiotics, you must finish the whole course.

What is cystitis?

Cystitis is when the inside of your bladder becomes sore. Your urethra may also be sore. This can make the bladder and urethra very tender and painful, mostly when you pee. You may notice:

- stinging or burning when you pee
- feeling like you need to pee all the time. This happens even if your bladder is nearly empty
- aching in your lower tummy
- dark or strong-smelling pee
- blood in your pee
- pee that smells bad

Older people may feel confused if they have a bladder infection. Sometimes, the infection can spread to your kidneys. This can make you feel very unwell. You may get a high temperature, sickness or vomiting. You must see your GP if this happens.

What causes cystitis?

More than half of all women get cystitis during their life. Many women get it more than once.

Here are the most common causes:

Body shape. In women, the openings for your urethra, vagina and anus are close together. This makes it easy for germs to reach your bladder. Your anus is your bowel opening.

Germs from your bowel. Germs live in your bowel and on the skin nearby. They are usually harmless. Sometimes they can cause problems if they get into your bladder. E-coli is the most common germ that causes cystitis.

Sex. Cystitis can sometimes start after you have sex.

Menopause. Oestrogen is a hormone that helps protect against infections in your pee. After menopause, your body makes less oestrogen. This makes you more likely to get infections in your pee.

For most women, cystitis is annoying but not dangerous. It often gets better in a few days without medicine. If your symptoms are bad or do not go away, you may need antibiotics.

What can I do to help myself?

There are things you can do to feel better:

- Drink lots of water as soon as you feel symptoms.
- Do not drink strong coffee, tea, alcohol, fruit juice or fizzy drinks.
- Take a painkiller like paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- Do not take antibiotics left over from old infections.
- Do not take antibiotics from other people.
- If your doctor has given you self-start antibiotics:
 - collect a urine sample for the lab
 - then start taking your antibiotics

How can I stop it coming back?

There are a few things that might help.

- Drink about 2 litres every day. This is about 4 pints.
- Use plain, gentle soap to wash around your vagina area.
- Do not use these things around your vagina area:
 - bubble bath
 - talcum powder
 - sprays
 - wipes
- Keep your skin healthy. Do not shave or wax close to your urethra or vagina.
- Your doctor may give you a vaginal cream or pessary with oestrogen. This can help women who have been through the menopause.

If cystitis happens after sex:

- Have a pee right after sex. This will help flush out germs.
- Drink more around the time you have sex. This will help flush out germs.
- Spermicides can raise the chance of infection. If you use a cap for birth control, ask your doctor about other options. We call a cap a diaphragm.

Your doctor may suggest:

- Taking 1 antibiotic tablet after sex. This can help stop infection.
- If you have more than 2 infections in 6 months:
 - taking low-dose antibiotics
 - taking a medicine called Hiprex

This can help stop the infections from coming back.

When should I see my GP?

See your doctor if:

- the tips above do not help
- you feel unwell with a
 - high temperature
 - sickness or
 - vomiting

Your doctor may ask for a pee sample. We call this a midstream sample of urine. To do this, catch a small amount of urine halfway through emptying your bladder. Do not collect the first or last part of the pee flow. This may cause a false result.

Tell your doctor if you have itching or discharge from your vagina. They may take a swab to check for infection.

Most women who get cystitis a lot do not need special tests. You may need more checks if:

- the infection does not go away
- you get infections often
- the infection spreads to your kidneys
- your bladder does not fully empty
- you have blood in your pee but no infection

What treatment will I get?

Cystitis can happen for different reasons. Your doctor will help you find the best way to treat it.

Most infections get better in a few days by drinking more fluid. You may not need antibiotics.

If you get antibiotics, take all the tablets as told. If your pee test shows a different germ, your doctor may change your medicine.

Important

We have worked hard to make this leaflet clear and correct. But it cannot replace advice from your own doctor or nurse. Always ask them if you are worried or unsure.

What should I do with this leaflet?

You can keep this leaflet. If you have more questions, ask your doctor or nurse. They can explain more.

Online access

You can see this leaflet on the internet. Scan the special picture (QR code).



<https://rb.gy/s89vxl>

Feedback

We'd love to know what you think! You can share your thoughts by emailing us at admin@baus.org.uk

