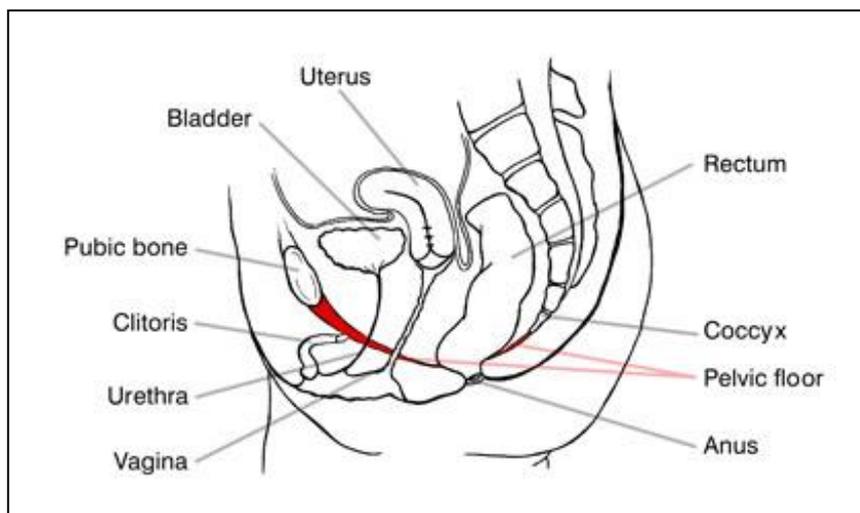


## Cystitis – Urinary Tract Infections in Women

### How cystitis develops

Cystitis can be caused by:

- Bacteria – the bacteria which normally live in your bowel can cause inflammation if they get into the urethra or bladder. In a woman, the urethra is in very close proximity to the anus (bottom) making the transfer of bacteria easier. Also, in a woman the urethra is only about 4 cms long, giving easy access to the bladder for the bacteria.
- Friction – sometimes the urethra can be bruised during sex, as the urethra is situated very close to the front wall of the vagina. In the past this was often known as “Honeymoon cystitis”.
- Overactive bladder syndrome – a particularly sensitive overactive bladder that contracts with little provocation.



### Prevention

- Drink 1½ - 2 litres of liquid a day – avoiding tea, coffee, alcohol, cola and acidic drinks.
- Cranberry juice or tablets have been shown to prevent urinary tract infections. **BUT do not take cranberry products if you are on warfarin.** Tablets may be more convenient, but these should be the high dose cranberry tablets.
- Pass water regularly – don't hang on until the last minute.
- Make sure that you empty your bladder completely when you pass water, ensuring that you sit down to empty your bladder and don't “hover”, as this can prevent your bladder from emptying completely.
- Always wipe your bottom from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria from the anus.
- Soap and water or “wet toilet wipes” may be more effective at cleaning the area than dry toilet paper.
- Avoid using perfumed soaps, deodorants, antiseptics or talc in the genital area.

- Avoid wearing “thong” style underwear, as this can aid the transfer of bacteria from the anus.
- Avoid tight trousers, as this can allow a warm damp environment to develop, which will encourage the growth of the bacteria. Tight jeans can also cause a problem, as the seam in the crotch area can bruise the urethral opening.

If you get cystitis after sex it may help to:

- Wash/shower and pass urine before and after sex (ask your partner to do the same, particularly under his foreskin).
- Use a lubricant when you have penetrative sex to avoid bruising the urethra.
- Try changing sexual positions to avoid bruising the front wall of the vagina.

### Signs and symptoms

When you have cystitis you will experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- A burning feeling in the urethra when you pass urine – sometimes there can be blood in the urine or it may be cloudy.
- A feeling that you need to pass urine very frequently, even though there may be hardly any urine to pass.
- A dragging ache in the lower back or abdomen.
- A temperature.

### Self-help treatment

There are several things you can do to relieve the symptoms.

- Drink 500mls of liquid as soon as you recognise the symptoms. Then, every 20 minutes, drink at least another 250mls of fluid. After three hours you will probably find the symptoms begin to wear off. Lots of water or any other bland liquid – weak squash) helps to flush out bacteria and to dilute your urine so that it does not sting as much when you pass urine.
- Place a hot-water bottle or microwave heat pad, wrapped in a towel between your legs, on your lower back or stomach to help ease the pain. Do not leave on for longer than 15 minutes.
- Take a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda mixed with water, or other weak fluid, every hour. This makes your urine less acidic and so stops the bacteria multiplying. It also eases the stinging when you pass urine. **(Anyone with high blood pressure or heart trouble should not take bicarbonate of soda.)**
- Take some pain killers such as Paracetamol.
- Relax and rest.

### Where to go for help

- Your local pharmacist, who can sell you a treatment to relieve the symptoms of cystitis.
- Your own GP or walk-in centre
- Your local NHS sexual health clinic.

## **When to see the doctor**

You should always see your GP or a doctor if:

- An attack of cystitis continues for more than a day or two or you have repeated episodes.
- You are pregnant (because pregnant women are particularly prone to kidney infections and this may affect your pregnancy).
- You notice blood in your urine.
- You have other symptoms, such as a vaginal discharge.
- You think your cystitis symptoms could be caused by a sexually transmitted infection.

## **Tests, diagnosis and treatment**

- If you have pain on passing urine, increased frequency, cloudy urine and a raised temperature your doctor may prescribe antibiotics without testing your urine.
- If you only have some of the symptoms, then the doctor/nurse will test your urine with a dipstick to see if you have an infection.
- However, if you are getting repeated infections or the infections are not clearing, your doctor will ask you for a sample of urine, to send away for testing in order to identify the correct antibiotic.
- If you have repeated infections it is also important to send a urine specimen after your course of antibiotics to confirm that the infection has cleared.
- If you are allergic to any antibiotics, or if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, it is important that you tell your doctor.
- It is important that you finish any course of treatment. If the treatment is interrupted, it may be necessary to start again from the beginning.

## **Further information**

Book by Angela Kilmartin - Patients Encyclopaedia of Cystitis, Sexual Cystitis and Interstitial Cystitis.

- If you have a problem with your outpatient care, that the staff are unable to resolve, you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who will be happy to help you. PALS offer assistance, advice and support for patients and their families. The service can help if you have worries or concerns about treatment or care.

Peterborough City Hospital, Edith Cavell Campus, Bretton Gate, Peterborough, PE3 9GZ