

Cystitis

Advice on prevention and treatment
Your questions answered

Cystitis

What is cystitis & what causes it?

Cystitis is an inflammation inside the bladder and more than half the women in the UK will have cystitis at some time or other. Many women suffer from repeated episodes. Men can get cystitis but it is much less common. Cystitis may cause all or some of the following symptoms;

- Pain on passing urine or very quickly after passing urine, this is called dysuria.
- More frequent need to pass urine, but often of very small amounts, this is called frequency.
- Ache in lower abdomen or back.
- Urine passed may be smelly & cloudy and may sometimes have blood in it.

Cystitis is often caused by a bacterial infection. Women are thought to be more prone to infection because the urethra, or passage from the bladder, is shorter than in a man and its opening is closer to the anus, or "back passage", both of which make the spread of bacteria from the anus more likely.

Cystitis can also be caused by "bruising" to the urethra following penetrative sexual intercourse, the so-called "honeymoon cystitis".

Is there anything you can do to help yourself?

Drinking a pint of water as soon as you feel any symptoms and drink a further half-pint every 20 minutes over the next 3 hours or so. A hot water bottle (being very careful to avoid scalding yourself) on your lower tummy or back may help relieve some pain and take a couple of painkillers. Some women find cranberry juice more effective than plain water. Adding a small amount of bicarbonate of soda to the water may also be more effective in relieving symptoms.

When should I go to the doctor?

Men should always go to the doctor if they have symptoms of cystitis.

Women should see the doctor if;

- Your symptoms last for more than a day or two, or
- You are having repeated episodes of cystitis, especially if you are past the "change of life".
- You are pregnant
- You notice blood in your urine
- You have other symptoms such as fever, or vaginal discharge or severe back pain.

Take a fresh sample of urine with you in a clean bottle or be prepared to pass a sample on your arrival at the Doctor's. If it seems likely to the doctor or nurse, from your symptoms and any tests done on your sample of urine, that your cystitis is caused by a bacterial infection, you are likely to be given a 3-day course of antibiotics. 3-day courses have been shown to be every bit as effective as longer courses of antibiotics.

Can cystitis be prevented?

Drinking at least 4 pints of fluids (but not tea or coffee) each day helps. Cranberry juice may be more effective/preferable to plain water.

Pass urine whenever you feel the need and make sure your bladder is as empty as possible by sitting for a couple of minutes after your flow has stopped and see if you can pass a little more, this is called "double voiding".

Always wipe your "bottom" from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria from your "back passage".

Avoid perfumed soaps and deodorants etc in the genital area.

Empty your bladder before going to bed at night.

Post-menopausal women especially should consider the use of a lubricant when having penetrative sex.

Post-menopausal women suffering repeated episodes of cystitis need to discuss vaginal oestrogen creams or tablets with their doctor, as this is the most effective treatment to prevent or reduce episodes of cystitis.

Some useful web-addresses

The British Menopause Society

www.the-bms.org

Menopause Online

www.menopause-online.com

Health Education Scotland

www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk