

Cystitis in women

What is cystitis?

Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder (the sac that stores urine) and is the most common type of urinary tract infection. It usually occurs when bacteria that normally live in the bowel travel up the short tube (urethra) that connects the bladder to the outside. Once inside the bladder, these bacteria grow quickly.

Cystitis is common in women of all ages. Around 30-50 per cent of women will have cystitis at some time in their lives. A woman is most likely to get cystitis when sexually active, while pregnant and after menopause. The infection cannot be passed to others during sex.

Women get cystitis more often than men because women have a shorter urethra. The urethral, vaginal and anal openings are very close, making it easy for bacteria to be spread from one to the other.

What are the symptoms?

- Stinging or burning when you pass urine
- Passing only small amounts of urine
- An urge to pass urine more often
- Feeling that the bladder is still full after passing urine
- Smelly, cloudy, dark or bloody urine
- Pain low down in the abdomen
- Feeling unwell with nausea, fever and headache (uncommon)

Treatment

- A urine sample is necessary to test for the type of infection
- Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. You should take the full course even if you feel better, as some bacteria may still be active.
- The results of your urine sample should be rechecked with your local doctor to make sure you are taking the correct antibiotics
- Agents to change the acidity of the urine (alkalinisers) such as Citralite®, Citravescent® or Ural® can help improve symptoms and can be purchased at a pharmacy and some supermarkets. Another option is to take one teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water (250mL) three times a day. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if these are okay to take with other medications you may be taking.

Home care

- Ensure you completely empty your bladder each time you urinate
- Get plenty of rest
- Take mild painkillers such as paracetamol for pain if necessary
- A heat-pack on your abdomen can help decrease the pain. It can be applied for up to 20 minutes every hour, as needed. Check your skin after five minutes; if a rash or irritation occurs, remove the heat pack.

What to expect

While cystitis can be very uncomfortable, it is easy to treat with antibiotics. They act quickly and symptoms often improve within one or two days.

If symptoms persist, see your local doctor. Cystitis can become serious if left untreated and may lead to a kidney infection and sometimes kidney damage (see 'Seeking help' section below).

Can cystitis happen again?

Women who have had one infection are likely to develop another. This is more likely in sexually active women. Recurrent cystitis should be treated early, so see your local doctor if your urinary symptoms return. This is especially important if you are pregnant – an untreated infection may affect the growth of your baby.

If your cystitis keeps coming back, you may need further tests and a referral to a urologist (a doctor who specialises in urinary problems) for further treatment. Some people may need low-dose antibiotics to prevent repeat infections for a period of three to six months, or longer.

Prevention

There are some simple measures you can take to prevent further attacks:

- Drink plenty of water
- Pass urine often, empty your bladder completely and do not 'hold on'
- Wipe yourself from front to back after going to the toilet
- Pass urine soon after sex
- Avoid using soap or perfumed products on your genital area

PATIENT INFORMATION

- Cranberry juice/capsules help prevent infections if taken daily (they stop bacteria sticking to the walls of the bladder). Tell your doctor if you are taking cranberry supplements as they may interfere with some antibiotics.

Seeking help

Cabrini Emergency Department (ED) is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

Attend the Cabrini ED if you develop:

- **Severe pain in your back and/or loin area**
- **Fever or chills**
- **Nausea or vomiting**
- **Blood in your urine**

If you are already taking oral antibiotics and you have any of the above symptoms, you need to seek further medical help and may need intravenous (into the vein) antibiotics.

Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Better Health Channel at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au