

Avoiding Bladder Infections

What are they?

Bladder infections are very common in women. They are also called urinary tract infections (UTIs) or cystitis. Women get them more often than men, because the urethra (the tube that urine passes through) is shorter in women. Women may be more likely to get a bladder infection when they are pregnant, going through menopause or if they use a diaphragm and/or a spermicide.

A bladder infection can be just a bother or it can become quite painful and even dangerous. You get a bladder infection when bacteria that normally live in the intestines and on the genitals get into the urethra. These bacteria travel into the bladder and cause an infection.

You may have a bladder infection if you have any of the following symptoms:

- you feel the need to urinate (pee) but only a few drops come out
- you are urinating a lot more often than usual
- you have pain or burning when you urinate
- you have cloudy or bad smelling urine or blood in the urine
- you have pain in the lower abdomen

If you think you have a bladder infection:

- Start drinking water every hour.
- Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, cola drinks) and alcohol, because these drinks can irritate the lining of the bladder.
- See your doctor.

Over 

Be sure to see your doctor immediately:

- if you experience back pain
- if you get fever or chills
- if you see blood or pus in your urine (pee)

If a persistent bladder infection is not treated, in some cases, it can get worse and eventually affect your kidneys. Doctors usually treat a bladder infection with antibiotics.

Prevention

- Urinate before and after sexual intercourse.
- Urinate as soon as you feel the urge.
- Empty your bladder completely when you urinate.
- Try to keep a healthy immune system by getting enough rest, eating properly and exercising.
- Drink 6 – 8 glasses of water a day.
- Take showers rather than baths.
- Wipe from front to back.
- Avoid douching.
- Use condoms and lubricant to prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).
- Some women find that drinking unsweetened cranberry juice can help to prevent bladder infections.

Other info sheets in this series:

- Avoiding HIV
- Dealing with bacterial vaginosis
- To shave or not to shave
- Avoiding yeast infections
- Normal vaginal fluids

November 2009
PH0909SS248

AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine 416-392-2437

416.338.7600
toronto.ca/health

 **TORONTO**
Public Health