

# Urethritis in Women

## What is urethritis?

Urethritis is irritation or infection of the urethra. The urethra is the tube that empties urine from the bladder. A woman's urethra is short (about 1 and 1/2 inches long). Its opening is just above the vagina and not far from the anus (rectal area). This means it is easy for bacteria to enter a woman's urethra from these areas.

## What is the cause?

Urethritis may be caused by an infection. Yeast infections and sexually transmitted diseases or infections (also called an STD or STI), such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, are common causes.

Urethritis may also be caused by irritation of the genital area from:

- Rubbing or pressure from tight clothing or sex
- Physical activity such as bicycle riding
- Irritants such as soap, body powder, and spermicides

Lack of the female hormone estrogen causes the tissues of the urethra and bladder to get thinner and drier after menopause. This is a common cause of urethritis in older women.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain when you urinate
- Feeling the need to urinate often
- A feeling that your bladder is never empty
- Pain during sex

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Your provider may swab the urethral area and cervix to test for bacteria in the lab. A sample of your urine may be tested for infection.

## How is it treated?

Your healthcare provider will likely prescribe antibiotics if your symptoms are caused by a bacteria. Symptoms caused by an infection should stop within a few days after you start taking antibiotics.

If your symptoms are caused by an STD or STI, treating the infection should help. Your sexual partner should also be treated.

Your provider may prescribe another medicine to help relieve burning with urination and discomfort in the bladder.

If you have reached menopause and are not taking estrogen, prescription vaginal cream may help prevent tissue thinning and dryness.

## **How can I help take care of myself?**

- If you have an STD, do not have sex before both you and your partner have finished all of the medicine and your provider says it's OK.
- Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. If you were prescribed an antibiotic, take all of it as prescribed, even if you have no symptoms. Ask your provider:
  - How and when you will hear your test results
  - How long it will take to recover
  - What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
  - How to take care of yourself at home
  - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

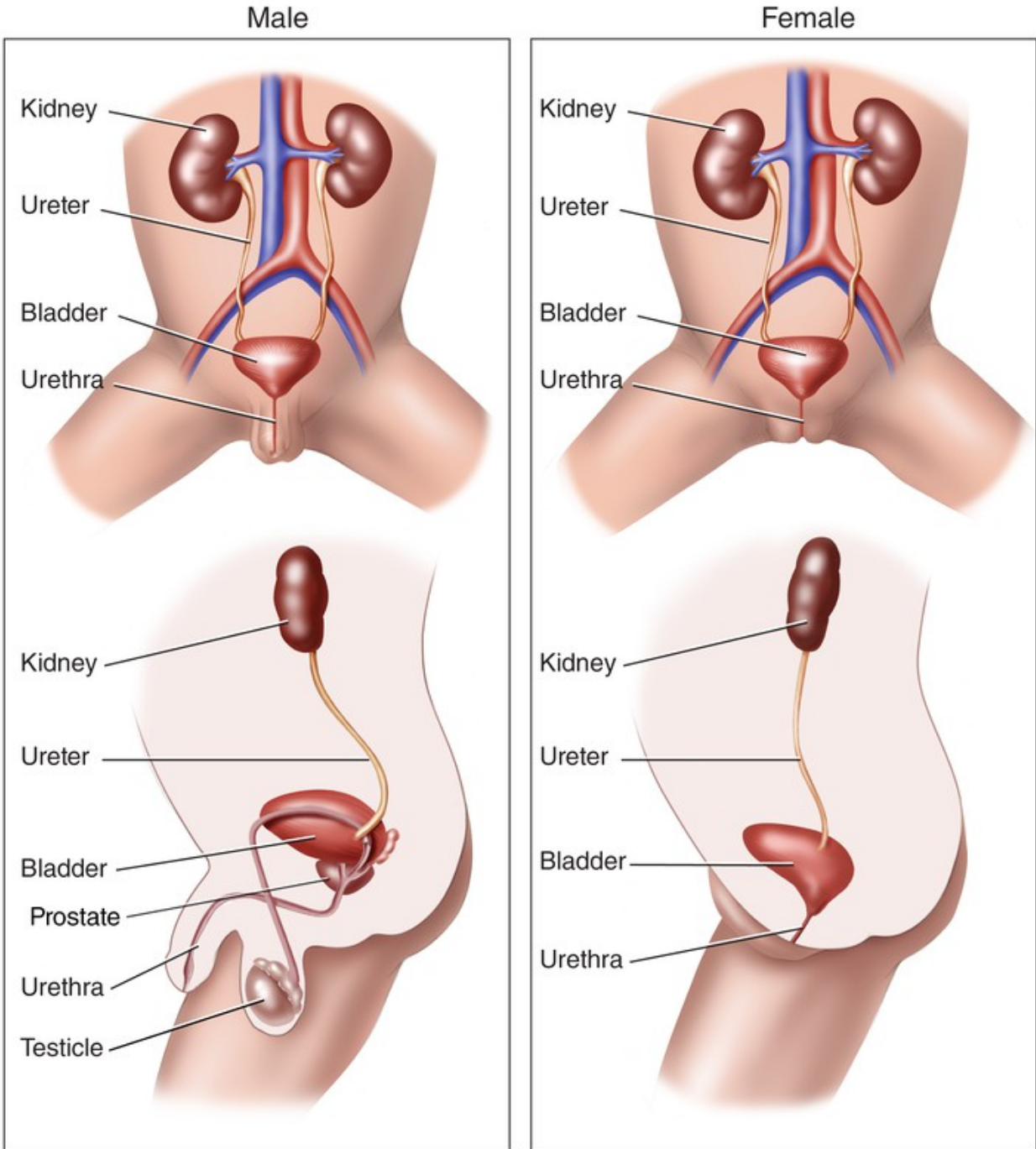
## **How can I help prevent urethritis?**

- Avoid tight clothes in the genital area, such as control-top pantyhose and tight jeans. Take wet bathing suits off right away.
- Don't use irritating cosmetics or chemicals in your genital area. This includes, for example, strong soaps, feminine hygiene sprays, douches, scented tampons, sanitary napkins, or panty liners.
- Keep your vaginal area clean. Wiping from front to back after using the toilet may help prevent infections. Use mild, unscented soap to wash your genital area gently each time you bathe or shower.
- Wear underwear that is all cotton or has a cotton crotch. Pantyhose should also have a cotton crotch. Cotton keeps your body cooler than nylon. Change underwear and pantyhose every day.
- During pregnancy, tell your healthcare provider if you often have urinary tract symptoms.
- If you are sexually active, have just 1 sexual partner who is not sexually active with anyone else.
  - Ask your partner to get tested for chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV, and other STDs.
  - Avoid any chemicals (including scents, colors, or flavors in condoms) before or during sex. Using unscented lubricant, such as KY jelly, is OK.
  - Use latex or polyurethane condoms during sex to help prevent infection with an STD.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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# Urinary System



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