

 Leaflet: Cystitis in Women

## Cystitis In Women

Cystitis is an inflammation of the bladder. This leaflet deals with cystitis due to a urine infection which is the common cause of cystitis. Typical symptoms of cystitis are pain on passing urine and having to go to the toilet often and quickly, but passing only small amounts of urine. Other symptoms may include pain in the lower abdomen, blood in the urine and fever. Most urine infections are due to bacteria (germs) from the person's own bowel. This occurs because some bacteria lie on the skin near the anus (back passage). These can travel the short distance round into the bladder. Bacteria thrive in urine so they multiply quickly and cause cystitis. Women are more prone to cystitis than men as the opening to pass urine (urethra) is nearer the anus.

About half of all women will have at least one attack of cystitis in their lifetime. About half of these women have 2 or more bouts of cystitis. Cystitis is a recurring problem in some women.

### Can I be sure it is cystitis?

Some conditions may cause similar symptoms to cystitis. For example, vaginal thrush or vaginal dryness of the menopause. Scented soaps, deodorants, bubble baths, etc, may 'irritate' the genital area in some women causing mild pain on passing urine. A sample of urine is often requested. A simple 'dipstick' test can be done in less than a minute. This shows if there are any bacteria in the urine. It is a fairly reliable test and usually no further test is needed. Sometimes a urine sample has to be sent to the 'lab' to find out exactly which bacterium is causing the infection.

### How is cystitis treated?

- ◆ *Antibiotics* - a three day course of an antibiotic is the usual treatment. Symptoms usually improve quickly. If they are not gone or nearly gone after 3 days, go back to see a doctor. Some bacteria that cause cystitis are 'resistant' to some antibiotics. If symptoms persist it is usual to send a urine sample to the laboratory. This finds which bacterium is causing the infection and which antibiotic is the best treatment. Usually a change of antibiotic will then clear the infection.
- ◆ *Drink plenty of fluid* is traditional advice. Some people also say that it may be possible to 'ward off' a developing cystitis by drinking plenty of fluids to 'flush out the bladder'. However, this advice is now controversial. Some doctors feel that this does little to help and drinking lots causes inconvenience and more (painful) toilet trips.
- ◆ *Potassium citrate* or other similar products are popular as they are available at the pharmacy without a prescription. They may help to reduce the symptom of 'burning urine' until the infection goes.
- ◆ *Paracetamol or aspirin* will usually help with any pain or discomfort.
- ◆ *No treatment is an option* - in about half of women with cystitis the symptoms will be gone within 3 days without any treatment. The body can often fight off infecting bacteria. Perhaps just taking potassium citrate to help with symptoms and see if it clears may be preferred if symptoms are mild. However, pregnant women should always seek medical advice if they suspect a urine infection.

It is best to consult a doctor if cystitis becomes a frequent, recurring problem. This will be to check for unusual underlying problems and to discuss ways of preventing cystitis.

[Return to top](#)