



Delivering a Healthy WA

# Cystitis

## What is Cystitis?

Cystitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the bladder, usually caused by an infection. It affects women more than men, and can occur at any age.

Your bladder stores urine. When you urinate, the urine goes to the outside of the body through a tube called the urethra.

If it's painful or uncomfortable when you pass urine, you could have cystitis. If you don't treat it, cystitis can lead to serious kidney infection.

Most cystitis is caused by bacteria that live in the bowel. They are harmless in the bowel but cause problems when they reach the urethra and go up to the bladder. This can occur during sex, or if you wipe your genital area from the back to the front after a bowel movement.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Burning or pain when passing urine
- Needing to pass urine a lot
- A constant, dull ache in the lower belly
- Urine that smells, or contains blood or is cloudy.

If you don't treat cystitis, you can develop backache, fever or bouts of shivering. See a doctor immediately as this could mean the infection has reached the kidneys, and could cause kidney damage.

## Checking it out

If you think you have cystitis, see a doctor, who will test your urine. If you have cystitis, you will probably need antibiotics, rest and plenty of water.

Symptoms should disappear after a few days' treatment, but you need to take all the antibiotics to make sure the infection has completely gone. If the antibiotics don't help, see the doctor again.

The doctor may also check for other possible causes of the symptoms. This check may include a pelvic examination to ensure the vagina is healthy, or an X-ray or ultrasound of the urinary system.

## Could it be something else?

Sexually transmitted infections (STI) often cause infections of the urethra and symptoms similar to cystitis. It's extra important for people aged under 25 to be tested for chlamydia.



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Other reasons for cystitis include kidney stones and abnormal growths in the urinary tract.

Women with diabetes are more likely to get cystitis. Pregnant women with cystitis are more likely to get kidney infections.

Cystitis in children can be serious. If your child has any symptoms, take them to a doctor as soon as possible.

## Helping yourself

The following self-help treatments can help, but they won't cure the infection. You still need to see a doctor.

Drink lots of water (not coffee, tea or alcohol) - at least 2 litres a day.

Adding a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda to a glass of water can help, or you can get similar, acid reducing powders from your pharmacist. (Only use these for short periods, and not if you have kidney or heart disease.)

Take aspirin or paracetamol if you are in pain (follow the directions on the pack).

Put a hot water bottle or wheat pack on your back, tummy or between your legs. Have a warm bath, or rest in a warm bed.

Some people find drinking cranberry juice helps, but it's not a cure.

## Reducing the chances of an attack

If you often get cystitis:

- See your doctor.
- Drink lots of water - 2 litres a day.
- Avoid alcohol. It can make urine strong and acidic.
- Always wipe yourself from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Use plain toilet paper. Colours and perfumes can cause irritation.
- Don't hold on to urine for too long.
- Pass urine (go to the toilet) after having sex.
- Use a water-based personal lubricant when having sex.
- Wash your genital area and anus
- daily with water. Avoid lots of soap and scrubbing.
- Wear cotton underpants. Avoid tight jeans, synthetic pants or nylon tights.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat a healthy diet.

## Feelings

People who have cystitis often feel embarrassed, depressed or anxious. Talk about it with your doctor, a counsellor, or others who have the same problem (try one of the listed contacts).

Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program

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