

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are so common that most people assigned female at birth (AFAB) will have one at some point in their life. They are typically easy to identify and treat. The following information will help you understand the symptoms of a UTI, how they are treated, and how they can be prevented.

What is a UTI?

A UTI is a bacterial infection that usually involves the bladder and urethra (the tube that urine travels through to exit the body). Sometimes the bacteria can travel higher and infect the kidneys (pyelonephritis). Kidney infections can cause a more severe illness than a bladder infection. People AFAB are more likely than people assigned male at birth (AMAB) to get a UTI because their urethra is shorter, and bacteria can reach the bladder more easily.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a UTI usually come on quickly and often include:

- Urgency (a strong feeling that you need to urinate... right now)
- Urinating more frequently
- A sharp pain or burning sensation in the urethra
- Urine which has a strong odor, or appears cloudy
- Blood-tinged urine

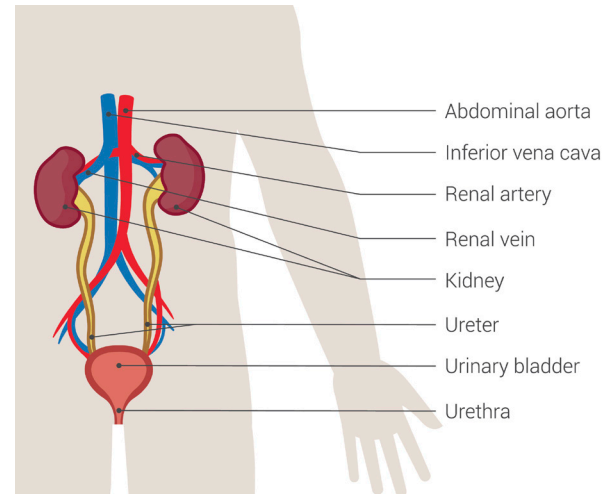
If the bacteria moves to the kidneys, you may feel:

- Mid back pain (typically on one side)
- Fevers or chills
- Nausea or vomiting

Symptoms such as unusual vaginal discharge, vaginal itching, redness or sores in the vaginal area, or painful sexual activity are usually not signs of a UTI. Your healthcare provider will need to help you identify the cause of these symptoms.

How is a UTI treated?

A simple UTI can usually be treated with a short course of antibiotics. Symptoms usually resolve quickly, but the full course of the antibiotic should be taken to reduce the chance that the infection will return.



The anatomy of people assigned female at birth (AFAB) includes a short urethra, making it easy for bacteria to infect the bladder.

How are UTIs prevented?

- Urinate soon after any vaginal sexual activity
- Drink enough fluid to consistently keep your urine a pale yellow color
- Urinate when you feel the urge, instead of waiting or “holding your urine” too long
- Avoid douching, perfumed sprays in the genital area, and spermicidal condoms or creams

Do you get frequent UTIs?

Some people experience frequent UTIs (3 or more in 6 months). If you get frequent UTIs, schedule an appointment at Cornell Health to talk with your primary care provider about additional preventive treatments. Visit health.cornell.edu/appointments.

