Urinary tract infections or UTIs are caused by bacteria (germs) that grow in the urinary tract. These germs typically come from outside the body, and travel into the urethra, bladder, and sometimes the kidneys. Women are prone to UTIs because the urethra is short and close to the rectum.

Causes of UTIs

UTIs can have various causes, including:

- Injury to the urethra, the tube that comes from the bladder to the urinary opening
- Personal hygiene, such as how you wash or wipe after going to the bathroom
- Irritation caused by sexual intercourse
- Not being able to pass your urine caused by drugs, illness, or injury
- Wearing tight clothing that traps moisture, such as nylon underwear
- Having a weakened immune system that increases a chance for infections
- Kidney stones

Signs of an infection

- Burning with urination (most common sign)
- Having to urinate often
- Having an intense urge to urinate, but not urinating much
- Lower abdominal pain
- Back pain
- Foul smelling urine
- Cloudy urine
- Blood in the urine
- Fever or chills (a sign infection may have reached your kidneys)
- Nausea or vomiting (a sign infection may have reached your kidneys)

The only way to know for sure if you have a UTI is to contact your doctor who will review your symptoms and test your urine.
Treatment for a UTI

Most UTIs can be easily treated with antibiotics, which kill the bacteria. It is important to take the full course of antibiotics and not to stop as soon as you feel better. If you do not take all the medicine, your infection may not be cured.

Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid every day. Extra fluid helps to rinse the bacteria out of the urinary tract. Water and fruit juices, especially cranberry juice, are helpful. Avoid coffee, tea, and coke with caffeine. Food and fluids that have caffeine can make your symptoms worse.

If bacteria makes its way to the kidneys, then it can become a kidney infection. This can be serious and damage your kidneys. In more serious cases, you may need to be treated in the hospital.

Preventing UTIs

- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Shower instead of taking a bath.
- Do not douche or use feminine hygiene products.
- Do not wear tight pants and nylon underwear that can trap moisture and make it easier for bacteria to grow. Wear cotton underwear instead.
- Keep your genital area clean, but do not scrub too hard with harsh soaps.
- Wash your genital area before and after sex.
- Urinate after sex to flush away bacteria that may have entered your urethra.
- Use condoms during sex.
- Urinate before you go to sleep.

Call your doctor if

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs, or if your signs get worse:

- Fever greater than 101 degrees Fahrenheit
- Nausea, vomiting, or chills
- Back pain
- Problems with your medicines

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.
For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.
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