

What You Should Know about Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

What is a UTI?

A UTI is an infection caused by bacteria that occurs in any part of the urinary system, such as the urethra, bladder, ureters and kidneys.

What are the symptoms of a UTI?

- Burning or pain when urinating (the strongest sign of a UTI)
- Pain in the lower stomach or back
- Increase in how often one needs to urinate
- Frequent urges to urinate
- Blood in the urine

Fever may or may not be present in addition to these symptoms.

Note: dark, foul-smelling, and cloudy urine are not enough to decide if someone has a UTI.

Should a urine specimen be collected to check if you have a UTI if you do not have symptoms?

No. The symptoms listed above should be present before collecting a urine specimen.

Is a change in mental status, fatigue, or a fall a symptom of a UTI?

No. A change in mental status (i.e. confusion), fatigue (i.e. more tired), or a fall may be due to other causes, such as dehydration, pain, depression, constipation, poor sleep, or medication side effects. Antibiotics should not be taken while other possible causes are being investigated.

I was given antibiotics before, but why not now?

In the past, doctors were taught to prescribe antibiotics for a positive urine specimen, even when symptoms of infection were not present. However, current research shows this is not correct. You should not receive antibiotics when you have no symptoms of a UTI.

What is asymptomatic bacteriuria?

Asymptomatic bacteriuria is when there are bacteria in your urine without any symptoms of a UTI. Asymptomatic bacteriuria is found in up to half of long-term care residents.

Why are there bacteria in my urine, but they are not causing an infection?

We have bacteria throughout our body, such as on our skin and in our colon, that is there to provide a healthy balance in our body's environment and will not cause an infection.

What is the treatment for asymptomatic bacteriuria?

None. Research has shown that there is no need to take antibiotics for asymptomatic bacteriuria. You should drink plenty of fluids and make sure you empty your bladder completely to lower your risk of getting a UTI.

Why are antibiotics harmful if you take them when you do not have an infection?

If you use antibiotics when you don't need them, they may not work when you get sick as the bacteria can mutate and become resistant. Other problems that can occur from taking antibiotics are allergic reactions, side effects (e.g. upset stomach), drug interactions, and an infection called *C. difficile* that can cause diarrhea and inflammation of your colon.

Asymptomatic bacteriuria is frequently mistaken for a urinary tract infection. It is important to understand the differences to avoid unnecessary use of antibiotics and potential harm.

Adapted from Scripps Healthcare Antimicrobial Stewardship Program and the Florida Department of Health.

This information is based on current literature and does not replace clinical judgement.



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