



# Preventing Bladder Infections

*Symptoms, causes, and what to do*

**Bladder infections occur when there are bacteria (germs) in your urine. You may get these infections more often if your health changes.**

**This handout explains the symptoms of a bladder infection and what to do if you think you have one. It also tells what to do to help prevent bladder infections.**

## **Causes**

Your chances of getting a bladder infection are higher if you:

- Hold too much urine in your bladder at a time.
- Cannot empty your bladder all the way.
- Use a Foley catheter.
- Use a condom catheter.
- Need to pass a catheter into your bladder often.
- Do not empty your bladder often enough.
- Do not wear underwear.
- Do not wash your outer clothes often.
- Are a woman and do not wipe right after a bowel movement. (Be sure to wipe from front to back.)
- Are a man and have a prostate infection.

## **Symptoms**

Symptoms of a bladder infection are:

- Bladder contractions or urine leaking when a catheter is not in place
- Feeling the need to use a catheter or urinate more often than usual
- Burning feeling in your urethra, penis, or pubic area
- Urgency (you have to go right away)
- Suddenly not able to pass urine
- Nausea
- Flu-like feelings of being tired
- Having no appetite

### Preventing Infections

- **Empty your bladder often and completely. This washes out your bladder and keeps bacteria from growing.**
- **Drink lots of fluids.**
- **Empty your bladder at the same times every day and at other times when you need to.**

- Increased *spasticity* (stiff or rigid muscles) in your leg or abdomen
- Headache, fever, or chills
- Mild low back pain
- Sediment (sandy particles) or mucous in your urine
- Foul-smelling or cloudy urine

The way your urine looks may change if you change your diet or fluid intake. Changes in your urine do not always mean you have a bladder infection. Knowing the causes and symptoms of bladder infections can help you avoid them.

### If You Think You Have a Bladder Infection

1. **Take your temperature.**
2. **Call your health care provider.** Tell them your temperature and what your urine looks like. Also tell your provider if you have any allergies to antibiotics and the most recent antibiotic that you took for an infection.

Your provider may order a urine test. Urine test results are usually ready 24 to 72 hours after you turn in the sample.

While waiting for your test results, your provider will either:

- Begin antibiotic treatment right away. Your provider might change the antibiotic you are taking after your test results come in.  
Or
  - Wait to decide until your test results come in.  
Or
  - Choose not to treat you with an antibiotic at all (if you have bacteria in your urine but no symptoms of infection).
3. **Drink extra fluids to wash bacteria out of your system.** If you are on an intermittent catheterization (cath) program (ICP), you will need to cath more often to prevent your bladder from overstretching.
  4. Call your health care provider or go to the Emergency Room if:
    - Your temperature goes higher than 101°F (38.6C).
    - You have a fever more than 48 hours after you start taking antibiotics.

## Preventing Bladder Infections

- **Drink lots of fluids** – up to 4 quarts a day if you are on an ICP, and up to 6 quarts a day if you use a condom or Foley catheter.
- **Empty your bladder often.** This keeps your bladder from overstretching and losing muscle tone. Muscle tone loss means that your bladder will not empty completely. Bacteria can grow in the urine that stays in your bladder.
- **Clean the skin around your urethral opening area well.** This lowers the chance of bacteria entering your bladder.
  - Clean with soap and water twice a day around Foley catheters.
  - Wash your skin every day when you change a condom catheter.
  - Clean with antibacterial soap every time you cath.
- **Use the right technique for cathing.** (See handout on “How to Change a Foley Catheter.”)
- **Follow the guidelines for cleaning catheters, leg bags, and night bags.** If your supplies are not cleaned right, your risk of getting bacteria in your bladder is higher. (See handouts on catheter cleaning.)

## Kidney Infection (*Pyelonephritis*)

A kidney infection is a serious problem that can lead to permanent kidney damage. If you have problems with your urinary tract, you have more chance of urine “backing up” into the kidneys. This backing up is also called *reflux*.

Kidney infections can cause serious complications. Sometimes they require a hospital stay and treatment with antibiotics given through an *intravenous* (IV) line. Kidney infections that are not treated or that happen often can cause permanent kidney damage. If you get a kidney infection, it must be treated right away.

## Causes

Kidney infections happen when bacteria from the bladder “backs up” into the kidneys. This can happen if:

- Your bladder gets overstretched by not emptying it often enough.
- High pressures develop in your bladder by not taking medicines prescribed for bladder spasms.
- Your catheter gets plugged and stays plugged too long.
- You have a bladder procedure (a *cystoscopy* or other test in which a catheter is used). Your urine should be checked for infections

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. The UWMC Clinic staff is also available to help.

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before you have one of these tests. You can then be treated for any infection you might have before the test. This will keep any bacteria from “backing up” into your kidneys when you have the test.

## Symptoms of Kidney Infection

Symptoms of a kidney infection are the same as the symptoms of a bladder infection, but they are usually worse. Kidney infections make you feel very ill. Symptoms are:

- Fever higher than 101°F (38.6°C) and chills
- Tenderness in your middle or lower back and side (flank)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Blood in your urine

## If You Think You Have a Kidney Infection

- **Take your temperature.**
- **Call your health care provider.**
- **If you cannot reach your provider, go to an Emergency Room right away.**

## Preventing Kidney Infections

- Follow the instructions on preventing bladder infections.
- Get regular health check-ups.
- Get medical care right away if you think you have a kidney infection.

## Review

- **Follow the guidelines for preventing bladder problems.** Pay close attention to what works best for your bladder. Be consistent in your self-care.
- **Know the causes and symptoms of infections.** Look closely at your urine each day.
- **Know what to do if you think you have an infection.** Keep this handout to look at when you are not sure what to do.
- **Get medical care right away if you have any of the symptoms of kidney infection.**

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