

Bladder Infections are an inflammation of the urinary bladder which results in a prickling pain, which quickly becomes a burning, scalding sensation during urination.

What to look for

- a burning sensation when urinating;
- frequent need to urinate with little result
- urine with a strong, foul odour and sometimes a dark brown/orange colour.
- in the elderly: lethargy, incontinence, mental confusion.
- In severe cases, these symptoms may be accompanied by fever and chills, abdominal pain, or blood in the urine.

Cystitis is a common condition which affects women much more than men. Women's physiological make up makes it all too easy for bacteria to travel from the bowel opening to the urethra (this is the tube coming out of the bladder). This relatively short passageway, only about an inch and a half long, makes it easier for bacteria to migrate into the bladder.

Bladder infections are not serious if treated promptly. But recurrences are common in susceptible people and can lead to kidney infections, which are more serious and may result in permanent kidney damage. So it's very important to treat the underlying causes of a bladder infection and to take preventive steps to avoid recurrences.

In elderly people, bladder infections are often difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are less specific and are frequently blamed on aging. Older people should be checked for this complaint if they have these specific symptoms.

Causes

Most bladder infections are caused by various strains of "E. coli", the bacteria commonly found in the intestines. Women sometimes get bladder infections as a direct result of intercourse, which can push bacteria up into the bladder through the urethra.

Some women contract the infection, dubbed "honeymoon disease" almost every time they have sex. Bacteria then rapidly reproduce in the stagnant urine left in the bladder. Some people develop symptoms of a bladder infection when no infection actually exists. These disorders are usually benign but are difficult to treat.

While they can be quite uncomfortable and potentially serious if complications set in, the bladder infections that most women get, clear up quickly and are relatively harmless.

In men, however, a bladder infection is almost always a symptom of an underlying disorder and is generally regarded as cause for more concern.

Hormonal imbalances can affect the balance of acidity and alkalinity in the urine and this can affect the likelihood of an attack of cystitis.

The contraceptive diaphragm or cap may lead to an attack of cystitis as leftover amounts of urine can get trapped in it and become a breeding ground for bacteria. Also the contraceptive pill affects the hormonal system and has been shown to make women using it more susceptible to common ailments such as thrush which can also trigger cystitis.

Bladder infections usually can be diagnosed readily with a urine test.

Traditional Treatment

Mild bladder infections often clear up quickly in response to simple home remedies. But if you experience no relief within 24 hours, you should consult a physician for more aggressive treatment. Do not just ignore the problem and hope it goes away.

Bladder infections are treated with a wide variety of antibiotics to clear up the infection and by increased intake of fluids to flush out the urinary tract. The antibiotic your physician prescribes and the number of days you will need to take it will depend on the type of bacteria that are causing the infection.

After the treatment has run its course, you may be asked to come in for a follow-up urine test to make sure your bladder is free of all signs of infection.

People with frequently recurring bladder infections are often prescribed low daily doses of antibiotics for an additional six months or longer. Patients whose infections are related to sexual activity may be given a small dose of antibiotics to take each time they have intercourse.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

If begun promptly at the first hint of burning during urination, alternative means of treatment can be very successful in relieving the symptoms of a bladder infection. But if these methods do not bring relief within

24 hours, you should call your doctor for antibiotic treatment. Consult with your doctor if you wish to continue with alternative methods while on the antibiotics to speed up the recovery process.

Herbal Therapies - Cranberry is the most popular herbal remedy for cystitis sufferers. It comes in tablet or capsule form and should be taken as per the bottle description or professional recommendation.

Another herb useful in treating bladder infections is nettle, which has been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties.

Women who are prone to bladder infections after sexual activity can help prevent recurrences by washing their perineal area with a medicinal solution of the herb goldenseal before and after intercourse.

Homoeopathy - Depending on the symptoms, Homoeopaths recommend a number of different remedies to help relieve the pain of a bladder infection. Here are three of the most commonly prescribed...

- If the urge to urinate is very strong and the burning is intense - Cantharis.
- If you experience painful cramping with urination or your urine is very dark or bloody - Mercurius corrosivus.
- For women whose infections are brought on by sexual contact - Staphysagria.

Seek professional help for exact dosages.

Aromatherapy - Adding certain essential oils to the bath can alleviate the symptoms of this problem. Try putting in a 5 - 6 drops of the essential oils of juniper, eucalyptus, sandalwood, pine, parsley, cedarwood, chamomile, or cajuput.

You can also try a massage oil made with 1 oz carrier oil and 5 drops each of any combination of the herbs mentioned. Massage daily, rubbing the oil over your lower back, abdomen, stomach, and hips. (see the aromatherapy entry for more information).

Dietary Considerations

Both conventional and alternative practitioners agree that drinking plenty of water to keep you urinating frequently and to flush out your urinary tract thoroughly is one of the most effective means of combating a bladder infection. However, you should avoid beverages that might irritate the urinary tract and aggravate the burning. Culprits include alcohol, coffee, black tea, chocolate milk, carbonated beverages, and citrus juices.

Until clear of the infection, you should also avoid potentially irritating foods such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, vinegar, sugar, chocolate, artificial sweeteners, and heavily spiced dishes. Wait 10 days after the burning is gone before reintroducing these foods and drinks one at a time into your diet.

Eat a balanced diet in general

Supplements of vitamin C and vitamin may also aid recovery. But check with your Doctor before taking the supplements. Vitamin C increases the acidity of urine, which hampers the growth of bacteria but can also interfere with the action of some antibiotics, making them less effective.

Personal Care

- Drink cranberry juice daily and take Cranberry Tablets to relieve the symptoms
- Saline drinks may help relieve the burning in the area
- Always wipe from front to back when going to the toilet
- Urinate as soon as possible when you feel the urge, and make sure you empty your bladder completely each time.
- urinate immediately after intercourse - it flushes out any bacteria that have got into the urethra
- Wear cotton underwear and loose, nonbinding clothing that does not trap heat and moisture in the crotch.
- Drink plenty of water.
- If you use a diaphragm for birth control, make sure it is well fitted and don't leave it in too long.

When to seek further professional advice

- you have the pain and burning sensation more than 24 hours after you begin trying self-help treatments. Untreated, bladder infections can lead to more serious conditions.
- painful urination is accompanied by vomiting, fever, chills, bloody urine, or abdominal or back pain; it may indicate potentially life-threatening kidney disease, a bladder or kidney tumor, or prostate infection. Seek medical help immediately.
- the burning is accompanied by a discharge from the vagina or penis, a sign of sexually transmitted disease, pelvic inflammatory disease, or other serious infection. **See your doctor without delay.**