

# Cystitis in Women

Cystitis is common in women. A three day course of antibiotics is a common treatment. It clears quickly without complications in most cases.

## What is cystitis?

Cystitis means inflammation of the bladder. It is usually caused by a urine infection. Typical symptoms are pain when you pass urine, and passing urine frequently. You may also have pain in your lower abdomen, blood in your urine, and fever (high temperature).

Most urine infections are due to bacteria (germs) that come from your own bowel. Some bacteria lie around your anus (back passage) after you pass a stool (faeces). These bacteria can sometimes travel to your urethra and into your bladder. Some bacteria thrive in urine and multiply quickly to cause infection. Women are more prone to cystitis than men as their urethra (the tube from the bladder that passes out urine) is shorter and opens nearer the anus.

About half of women have at least one bout of cystitis in their life. For many it is a 'one-off'. It is a recurring problem for some women. (A separate leaflet deals with recurring cystitis.)

## Can I be sure it is cystitis?

Some conditions cause symptoms that may be mistaken for cystitis. For example, thrush. Also, soaps, deodorants, bubble baths, etc, may irritate your genital area and cause mild pain when you pass urine. Your doctor or nurse may do a simple 'dipstick' test on a urine sample to check for cystitis. This detects bacteria in urine. It is fairly reliable and usually no further test is needed. Sometimes a urine sample is sent to the 'lab' to find out which bacterium is causing the infection.

## What is the treatment for cystitis?

- **Antibiotics.** A three day course is a common treatment. Symptoms usually improve within a day or so. See a doctor if symptoms have not gone, or nearly gone, after three days. (Some bacteria are resistant to some antibiotics. If symptoms persist it is usual to send a urine sample to the laboratory. This finds which bacterium is causing the infection and which antibiotics will kill it. A change of antibiotic is needed in some cases to clear the infection.)
- **Have lots to drink** is traditional advice to 'flush out the bladder'. However, there is no proof that this is helpful. Some doctors feel that it does not help, and drinking lots may just cause more (painful) toilet trips. Therefore, it is difficult to give confident advice on whether to drink lots, or just to drink normally.
- **Paracetamol or ibuprofen** ease pain or discomfort, and lower a high temperature.
- **Not taking any treatment** is an option if you are not pregnant. Your immune system can often clear the infection. (Studies have shown that in about half of cases, the symptoms and infection go within three days without treatment.) However, if you are pregnant, you should be treated with antibiotics to prevent possible complications.

See a doctor if you have recurring bouts of cystitis to discuss ways of preventing it.

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