

CYSTITIS

INTRODUCTION

Cystitis is inflammation of the lining of the bladder as a result of infection, irritation or damage. It is more common in women than men. This is because women have a shorter urethra (the tube that goes from the bladder out of the body) and its opening is located nearer the anus, which means that infection can occur more easily.

Cystitis is more common in pregnant women, sexually active women and women after the menopause, but it can occur at any age. Many women have at least one attack of cystitis in their lives, some women have frequent attacks. Children and men with cystitis, and women who get cystitis more than three times per year should always see their GP.

For men it is potentially more serious and should be treated quickly as the cause can be an underlying bladder or prostate infection, an obstruction or tumour, or an enlarged prostate.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of cystitis include:

- Pain, burning or stinging sensations when passing urine.
- Needing to urinate frequently and urgently, but only passing small amounts.
- Urine which is dark, cloudy, strong smelling or contains traces of blood.
- Pain directly above the pubic bone, or in the lower back or abdomen.
- Feeling generally unwell, weak and feverish.

Cystitis can also affect children. Their symptoms may include weakness, irritability, reduced appetite, vomiting, and pain when passing urine.

The symptoms described above may be caused by conditions other than cystitis, such as:

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhoea and Chlamydia.
- Being infected with a bacterium, such as E-coli.
- Thrush.
- Use of perfumed personal hygiene products.
- Inflammation of the urethra (urethritis).
- Urethral syndrome (women only).
- Inflammation of the prostate gland, known as prostatitis (men only).

CAUSES

Bacterial infection is the most common cause of cystitis. Bacterial infection of the bladder may be caused by:

- Not emptying the bladder fully, this can cause bacteria to multiply, leaving bacteria in the bladder. This is especially common in pregnant women because of the pressure on the pelvic area.
- Bacteria being pushed into the urethra in women, this can happen when you insert a tampon or when you are having sex.
- Spreading bacteria from your anus to your urethra when you go to the toilet in women, this can happen if you wipe from back to front rather than front to back.
- Damage caused to the area when changing a catheter.
- A blockage somewhere in the urinary system that prevents complete emptying of the bladder.
- An enlarged prostate gland in men, which can cause a blockage and bladder infections.
- Other bladder or kidney problems and diabetes.
- In menopausal women, the lining of the urethra and the bladder become thinned due to a lack of the hormone oestrogen. This thin lining is more likely to become infected and damaged. Women also produce less mucus around the vagina after the menopause, and without this mucus, bacteria are more likely to multiply. Menopausal women taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be less likely to get cystitis.
- In women, physical damage or bruising often caused by vigorous or frequent sex can lead to cystitis. This is commonly known as honeymoon cystitis.

TREATMENT

Mild cystitis will usually go away by itself in 2-4 days. If it doesn't, you should go to see your GP. In some cases (especially if you are pregnant), a short course (3 days) of antibiotics is given for cystitis.

- Over-the-counter painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken to reduce discomfort.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Cutting down on alcohol, tea and coffee should be reduced as they have a dehydrating effect
- Taking sodium citrate or potassium citrate in sachets or solutions (available in pharmacies) eases some of the symptoms.
- Drinking cranberry juice may help cystitis.
- Don't have sex until your cystitis has cleared up.

PREVENTION

It is not always possible to prevent cystitis, but here are some tips to try and avoid it:

- Make sure you're clean before and after sex, but avoid using perfumed bubble bath, soap and talc around your genitals.
- Don't wait to go if you need to urinate.
- Always empty your bladder fully when you go to the toilet.
- Wipe from front to back, not back to front.
- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight jeans and trousers.
- Use a lubricant when having sex to avoid damaging the area, and
- After having sex, make sure you empty your bladder as soon as possible to get rid of any germs.