

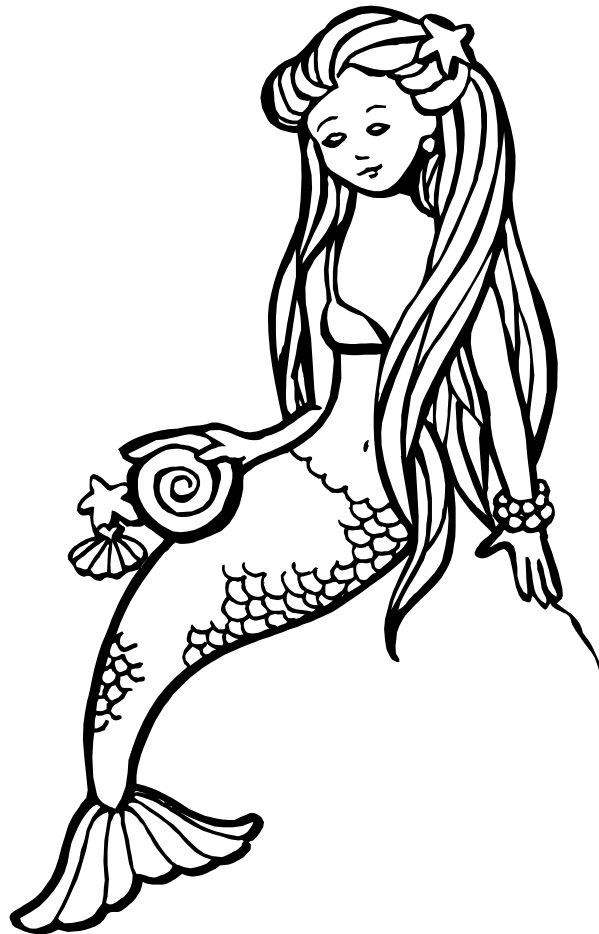
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CYSTITIS

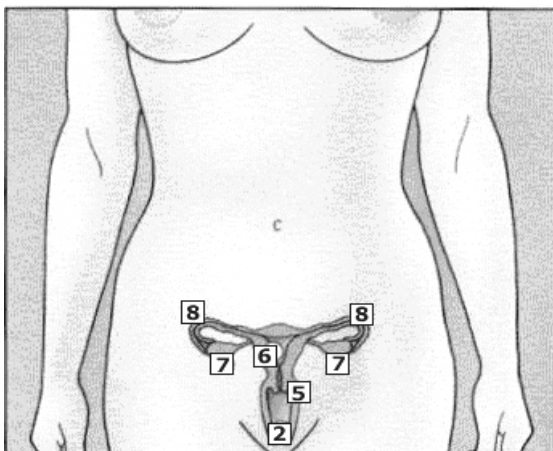


What it is and how to help yourself

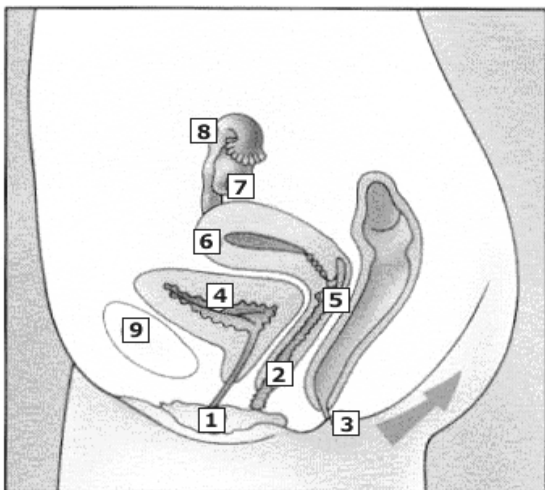
Cystitis is an inflammation or infection inside the bladder. It is by far the most common Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) in women. While the symptoms can sometimes be very distressing, cystitis in itself is not usually serious.

Over half of women suffer from cystitis at some stage of their lives and sometimes they keep getting it (recurrent cystitis).

This leaflet aims to give you information about how to recognise the symptoms of cystitis, the things you can do to help yourself, if and when to see your doctor and how you can prevent further attacks.



- Urethra (water passage) (1)
- Vagina (2)
- Anus (3)
- Bladder (4)
- Cervix (neck of the womb) (5)
- Womb (6)
- Ovary (7)
- Fallopian Tube (8)
- Pubic Bone (9)



- ◆ Some women find that diaphragms press against the urethra and some find they suffer an attack of cystitis due to allergic reaction to the spermicide used in condoms. Talk to your doctor if you suspect either of these may be a problem, but never stop using any birth control method unless you are planning to get pregnant and always practice safe sex
- ◆ If you suffer cystitis after sex, wash before and after (ask your partner to as well). Use a lubricant such as KY Jelly during intercourse. Also, emptying your bladder before and after sex could help
- ◆ After the menopause, you could experience vaginal dryness, leading to soreness and possibly bruising during penetrative sex. If this is the case, try using KY Jelly

Where else can I go for help?

If you think you may have a sexually transmitted infection, your local NHS sexual health (GUM) clinic will be able to offer you free, confidential testing and advice. The clinic may also advise your sexual partner to have a check up too.

Remember, after treatment, using condoms during sex can reduce your risk of getting or passing on sexually transmitted infections.



- ◆ Caffeine, alcohol and spices may all irritate the bladder and are best avoided as far as possible
- ◆ Pass water when you feel you need to, try not to hang on. Also, make sure you empty your bladder completely
- ◆ Always wipe and wash your bottom from front to back. This helps stop bacteria spreading from the anus
- ◆ Wash your genital area morning and night with plain, unperfumed soap
- ◆ Avoid the use of antiseptics, talcum powder, perfumed soap, bath products and deodorant in the genital area, in case you suffer an allergic reaction. Also, stop using any product if you experience irritation afterwards
- ◆ Avoid wearing tight trousers. Wear cotton pants and tights that have a cotton gusset. Alternatively, you could wear stockings or crotchless tights. Bicycling and horse riding can also affect the urethra

Who gets cystitis?

Cystitis can affect any woman at any age, including young girls. Men and children can get cystitis too, but it is much less common. They should always seek medical advice.

You are more likely to get cystitis if:

You are pregnant

Pregnancy makes changes in the body that can lead to women being more prone to a UTI, such as cystitis. Also, pressure of the foetus keeps some urine in the bladder, allowing bacteria to grow.

You are post-menopausal

Hormone changes can lead to vaginal dryness, causing soreness and bruising during sexual intercourse. This could promote an attack.

What causes it?

Any of the following can lead to an attack of cystitis:-

Bacteria

The entrance to a woman's water passage (urethra), vagina and anus are all very close together. This allows bacteria to easily travel from the anus, vagina and skin to the urethra. This can happen during sexual intercourse, when inserting tampons or by wiping or washing your bottom from back to front. Also, a woman's urethra is very short compared to a man's. This makes it easier for a woman's bladder to receive infection.

Other infections

Vaginal infections, for example thrush, can cause cystitis-like symptoms by irritating the urethra. However, an itchy, thick, white discharge is the main symptom of thrush. Bacteria that cause sexually transmitted infections, such as Chlamydia and herpes may also cause cystitis.

Toiletries

Vaginal deodorants, perfumed soap and bath products, talcum powder and detergents in washing powder can all alter your chemical balance and cause irritation inside the vagina.

Friction

The urethra is close to the vagina and can be bruised, perhaps during vigorous sex (often known as honeymoon cystitis). Tight pants or trousers can also cause friction.

Contraception

Using a contraceptive diaphragm with spermicide or using spermicide-lubricated condoms can all lead to an attack of cystitis. You can try using condoms without spermicide or hypo-allergenic condoms.

Changes in lifestyle, stress or depression

Many women are prone to an attack of cystitis when they are under stress and run-down. Some women can even suffer as an allergic reaction to something they have eaten.

- ◆ you have any other symptoms, such as vaginal irritation, soreness or discharge. This could mean you have a vaginal infection
- ◆ If you think your cystitis could have been caused by a sexually transmitted infection. If this is the case, you should ask advice about having sex during treatment

What might my doctor do?

- ◆ Your doctor might ask you for a urine sample to find out whether your cystitis is caused by bacteria. If it is, you will probably be given a course of antibiotics. If not, your doctor will advise you on self treatment and prevention
- ◆ If you also have a vaginal discharge or irritation, your doctor may take swabs from your vagina or cervix (neck of the womb) to find out if you need any other treatment

How can I prevent further attacks?

- ◆ Try to drink at least 1½-2 litres (3-4 pints) of fluid each day. This helps flush out any bacteria before it can get hold

Other things to try

Some women find that alternative or complimentary treatments, for example aromatherapy, help ease an attack. Also, your pharmacist will be able to sell you an over-the-counter treatment to relieve your symptoms.

Do I need to see a doctor?

Self treatment is often very effective, however, you should always see a doctor if:-

- ◆ An attack continues for more than 48 hours or if you have repeated attacks – you may have some other problem that your doctor will be able to treat
- ◆ If you are pregnant, as pregnant women are particularly at risk of a kidney infection
- ◆ If you notice more than a tinge of blood in your urine. You may need tests and perhaps antibiotics to clear up the problem. However, if you are pregnant or allergic to any antibiotic, it is important you tell this to your doctor
- ◆ If your symptoms are accompanied by a chill, fever, vomiting or pain in the kidneys

What are the signs and symptoms?

In a typical attack, you can have one or more of the following symptoms:

- ◆ A burning or scalding pain in the urethra when passing urine
- ◆ A frequent and/or urgent need to urinate, with little or no urine passed each time
- ◆ A dragging pain in your lower back or abdomen
- ◆ A feeling of incomplete emptying of the bladder
- ◆ You may notice your urine is cloudy and may even be tinged with blood
- ◆ Some sufferers may run a temperature

Sometimes passing water more frequently or feeling an urgent need to go may not be caused by cystitis. It could be a sign of another condition, such as:-

- ◆ A sexually transmitted infection, such as Chlamydia, gonorrhoea or herpes
- ◆ Pregnancy
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Fibroids in your womb

If you are in any doubt, or you have other symptoms not described here, consult your doctor.

What can I do when I have an attack of cystitis?

As long as you are in good health and not pregnant, you can usually treat mild symptoms yourself for 48 hours without consulting a doctor. Here are a few ways you can help yourself:

Drink plenty of water

At the first sign, drink a pint of water to dilute the urine. This will help to flush the bacteria out of the bladder and dilute the urine, making it less painful to pass. Then every 20 minutes for the next 3 hours, drink another ½ pint of water to keep urinating. Hopefully after the first few trips to the toilet, the symptoms will have begun to wear off.

You can try mixing a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda with $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of water. This reduces the acidity of the urine, which will slow down the rate at which bacteria multiply and also will ease the burning pain. Please note however that if you are taking other medication or if you have high blood pressure or heart trouble, you should consult your doctor before taking bicarbonate of soda.

You may also find that drinking cranberry juice and lemon barley water is helpful.

Fill some hot water bottles

Placing a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel between your thighs or on your lower back can help ease the pain.

Take a couple of painkillers

These can also help, but do follow the instructions that come with them, or ask your pharmacist.

Rest and relax

Make yourself comfortable in bed or on the settee. Try to take your mind off the discomfort by doing something you enjoy, reading or watching television.