



## Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

### Information for people over 65 years

#### What is a urinary tract infection (UTI)?

A urinary tract infection occurs when bacteria in any part of the urinary (kidney-bladder) system causes a person to feel unwell.

#### What are the signs and symptoms of a urinary tract infection?

- New pain or burning when passing urine
- New incontinence (loss of bladder control)
- Passing urine more often than usual
- New urgency (feeling the need to pass urine immediately)
- Pain or discomfort in your lower tummy above pubic area
- Visible blood in your urine
- Confusion\*, change in behaviour, or unsteadiness on feet

#### \*There may be other reasons for confusion:

- Pain
- Side effects of medicines
- Constipation
- Other infection
- Poor sleep
- Change in your routine or home environment
- Low mood
- Not drinking enough
- Poor diet

#### Symptoms of more severe urinary tract infection:

- High temperature or lower than usual temperature
- Shivering or shaking
- Pain in your back, just under your ribs
- Vomiting
- Suddenly feel very unwell
- Symptoms are getting a lot worse, or not starting to improve within 2 days of starting antibiotics

#### What should you do if you think you have a UTI?

Seek advice from your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

If you have symptoms of a more severe urinary tract infection, you should seek urgent medical attention.



### **How will the doctor know if you have a UTI?**

Your doctor will establish whether you have a UTI by checking all your signs and symptoms. In the past, your doctor may have used a urine dipstick test to check your urine for a UTI. Dipstick testing is no longer recommended for this purpose in people 65 years and over.

### **Why are urine dipsticks no longer recommended?**

Up to half of older people can have bacteria living in their urine. This can be normal.

The urine dipstick test cannot tell the difference between bacteria that are causing infection and those that are living harmlessly in the urine. This may lead to unnecessary antibiotic use.

### **How is a UTI treated?**

Your doctor will assess whether an antibiotic is required. Your doctor or nurse may ask for a urine sample to send to the laboratory. Please do not bring a urine sample to your GP practice unless you are requested to do so.

### **What can you do to help with symptoms of a UTI?**

Drink enough fluids to stop you feeling thirsty.

Take paracetamol at regular intervals for pain relief, if it is suitable for you.

Only take antibiotics if they have been prescribed for you, and make sure you take them exactly as directed.

### **Taking antibiotics be harmful when you don't need them**

Antibiotics can be life saving for serious urine infections, but antibiotics are not always needed for urinary symptoms.

Antibiotics can cause side effects such as rash, stomach upset, thrush or interactions with other medication. An infection called *Clostridioides difficile* diarrhoea (or C. diff) can also be caused by antibiotics.

Antibiotic use can cause antibiotic resistance. If bacteria become antibiotic resistant, the antibiotic that used to kill them no longer works. This means UTIs may be more difficult to treat in the future.

In certain circumstances you may be asked to take long term antibiotics to prevent a UTI. It is important that you speak to your doctor regularly about how long you need to take them for. Taking antibiotics for too long may do more harm than good.

## How can you help to prevent a UTI?

- Drink enough water each day. This means drinking enough that your urine is pale in colour and you do not feel thirsty
- Wipe from front to back when you go to the toilet
- Keep your genital area clean and dry. Avoid perfumed products, for example bubble bath, soap, talcum powder or wipes.
- Wear loose cotton underwear
- Try to fully empty your bladder when you pass urine
- Try not to delay going to the toilet when you need to pass urine
- Avoid getting constipated
- Pass urine as soon as possible after sex
- Change incontinence pads regularly if you use them
- Wash your hands after going to the toilet

## For further information

Please do not hesitate to ask the healthcare staff caring for you if you have any questions or are feeling unwell.

Information on UTI is also available on <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/urinary-tract-infections-uti/>

This leaflet was developed by the HSE Community Antimicrobial Pharmacists Group

Version 1. June 2023