

Preventing cystitis

If you get cystitis frequently, there are some things you can try that may stop it coming back. However, it's not clear how effective most of these measures are.

These measures include:

- not using perfumed bubble bath, soap or talcum powder around your genitals – use plain, unperfumed varieties
- having a shower, rather than a bath – this avoids exposing your genitals to the chemicals in your cleaning products for too long
- going to the toilet as soon as you need to pee and always emptying your bladder fully
- staying well hydrated – drinking plenty of fluids may help to stop bacteria multiplying in your bladder
- always wiping your bottom from front to back when you go to the toilet
- emptying your bladder as soon as possible after having sex
- contraception instead wearing underwear made from cotton, rather than synthetic material such as nylon, and not wearing tight jeans and trousers

Drinking cranberry juice has traditionally been recommended as a way of reducing your chances of getting cystitis. However, large studies have suggested it doesn't make a significant difference.

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Cystitis



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Cystitis is inflammation of the bladder, usually caused by a bladder infection.

It's a common type of urinary tract infection (UTI), particularly in women, and is usually more of a nuisance than a cause for serious concern. Mild cases will often get better by themselves within a few days.

However, some people experience episodes of cystitis frequently and may need regular or long-term treatment.

There's also a chance that cystitis could lead to a more serious kidney infection in some cases, so it's important to seek medical advice if your symptoms don't improve.

Signs and symptoms of cystitis

The main symptoms of cystitis include:

- pain, burning or stinging when you pee
- needing to pee more often and urgently than normal
- urine that's dark, cloudy or strong smelling
- pain low down in your tummy
- feeling generally unwell, achy, sick and tired

Possible symptoms in young children include a high temperature (fever) of 38C (100.4F) or above, weakness, irritability, reduced appetite and vomiting.

When to see your GP

Women who have had cystitis before don't necessarily need to see their GP if the condition returns, as mild cases often get better without treatment. You can try the self-help measures listed below, or ask your pharmacist for advice.

You should see your GP if:

- you have symptoms of cystitis for the first time
- your symptoms don't start to improve within a few days
- you get cystitis frequently
- you have severe symptoms, such as blood in your urine
- you're pregnant and have symptoms of cystitis
- you're a man and have symptoms of cystitis
- your child has symptoms of cystitis

Your GP should be able to diagnose cystitis by asking about your symptoms. They may test a sample of your urine for bacteria to help confirm the diagnosis.

What causes cystitis?

Most cases are thought to occur when bacteria that live harmlessly in the bowel or on the skin get into the bladder through the urethra (tube that carries urine out of your body).

It's not always clear how this happens, but it can be caused by:

- having sex
- wiping your bottom after going to the toilet – particularly if you wipe from back to front
- inserting a tampon or urinary catheter (a thin tube inserted into the urethra to drain the bladder)
- using a diaphragm for contraception

Women may get cystitis more often than men because their anus (back passage) is closer to their urethra, and their urethra is much shorter, which means bacteria may be able to get into the bladder more easily.

Treatments for cystitis

If you see your GP with cystitis, you'll usually be prescribed antibiotics to treat the infection. These should start to have an effect within a day or two.

If you've had cystitis before and don't feel you need to see your GP, you may want to treat your symptoms at home.

Until you're feeling better, it may help to:

- take paracetamol or ibuprofen
- drink plenty of water
- hold a hot water bottle on your tummy or between your thighs
- avoid having sex

Some people find it helpful to try over-the-counter products that reduce the acidity of their urine (such as sodium bicarbonate or potassium citrate), but there's a lack of evidence to suggest they're effective.

If you keep getting cystitis, your GP may give you an antibiotic prescription to take to a pharmacy whenever you develop symptoms, without needing to see your doctor first. Your GP can also prescribe a low dose of antibiotics for you to take continuously over several months.

