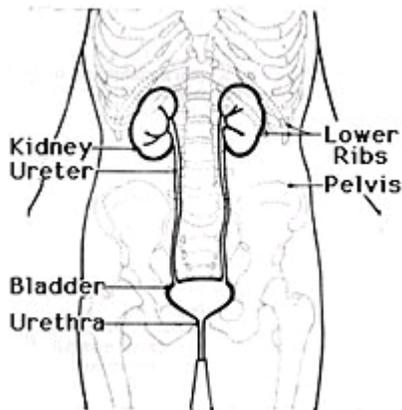




URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS IN ADULTS

The Urinary Tract



Urinary tract infections are a serious health problem affecting millions of people each year. Infections of the urinary tract are common--only respiratory infections occur more often. Each year, urinary tract infections (UTI's) account for about 8 million doctor visits. Women are especially prone to UTI's for reasons that are poorly understood. One woman in five develops a UTI during her lifetime.

Occasionally, bacteria can get into the urinary tract and cause an infection. The three most common types of urinary tract infections are:

1. **Cystitis** (infection of the bladder)
2. **Urethritis** (usually caused by infection of the urethra)
3. **Pyelonephritis** (infection of the kidneys)

What Causes A Urinary Tract Infection?

Cystitis and pyelonephritis usually are caused by bacteria (most frequently, E Coli) that are normally found in the colon or stomach and finally in feces. These bacteria's are spread from the rectum or vagina to the urethra and then to the bladder or kidneys. Urethritis, on the other hand, is usually caused by sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea or chlamydia.

Females are more likely than males to get urinary tract infections because the vagina is located close to the urethra. Bacteria spread from vagina or the rectum only have to travel an inch or two to reach a female's bladder.

Sexual intercourse may be a common cause of urethritis and bladder infections. Bacteria in the vagina or on the genitals can enter the urinary tract infection during intercourse. Birth defects in which a part or parts of the urinary tract are abnormal may also lead to urinary tract infections. Other causes include urinary tract stones (small hard formations of minerals which can be very painful as they are "passed") or bladder tumors.

What Are The Symptoms Of A Urinary Tract Infection?

The telltale symptom of urethritis is:

- * A burning sensation during urination

Cystitis may be responsible for:

- * A frequent urge to urinate
- * Pain in the lower abdomen or pubic area
- * Blood in the urine
- * General malaise (not feeling well), often accompanied by a slight fever

Pyelonephritis can cause the symptoms associated with cystitis, listed above, as well as pain in the back or side, high fever, chills, nausea and vomiting.

Sometimes a urinary tract infection may cause no symptoms. This is particularly true during pregnancy: about 4% to 7% of pregnant women have urinary tract infections without symptoms. This is one of the reasons physicians test a pregnant women's urine for the presence of infection. If present, the infection should be treated before it can harm her or her baby.

How Is A Urinary Tract Infection Diagnosed?

If the cause of your infection is not clear, a urine culture will be needed. This means that your urine sample will be sent to a laboratory where it will be stored and observed for the growth of bacteria. This test can tell what type of bacteria is responsible for the infection and which antibiotics will be best to treat it.

How is a Urinary Tract Infection Treated?

A number of very effective antibiotic agents are available to treat urinary tract infections that are due to bacteria. In some cases of urethritis and simple cystitis, just one dose of an antibiotic can cure the infection. For patients with more severe urinary tract infections, more days of antibiotics treatment may be necessary. Urethritis associated with sexually transmitted diseases or other vaginal infections may require more extensive treatment. It is very important to follow exactly your doctor's instructions for taking antibiotics. That is, even if your symptoms resolve before you finish your medication, you must finish all of it to avoid leaving only a partially treated infection.

How Can I Lower My Risk Of Getting A Urinary Tract Infection?

- * Use plenty of lubrication during sexual intercourse (Water-soluble lubricant).
- * Urinate after sexual intercourse
- * Drink plenty of fluids regularly to wash out the bladder
- * Urinate regularly; do not suppress the urge
- * Wipe from front to back after a bowel movement

Recurrent Urinary Tract Infections

Unfortunately, women who tend to get urinary tract infections may suffer three or more per year. If you have a problem with recurrent urinary tract infections, your doctor may refer you to a urologist (a urinary tract specialist) for further testing to determine the underlying cause of the frequent infections.