

Bladder and Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Bladder infections are one of the most common health issues after spinal cord injury. A bladder infection is also called a urinary tract infection (UTI). This is because the bladder is part of your urinary tract. Your urinary tract includes your kidneys, urethra, and ureters. Bladder infections happen when bacteria enter your bladder and multiply quickly. This can cause pain and make you feel sick. If not treated, a bladder infection can spread to the kidneys. A kidney infection is dangerous and in extreme cases can cause permanent damage and death.

Signs and Symptoms

The main sign of a bladder infection is pain when peeing. When you have a spinal cord injury, you might not be able to feel pain because of poor feeling. There are many other signs of a bladder infection. Learn to recognize the symptoms so that you can treat the infection early. If you think you have a bladder infection, contact your doctor.

| Urinary Symptoms | Body Symptoms |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Pain or burning when peeing | Fever (above 38°C) |
| Need to pee more often | Feeling sick |
| Bladder (abdomen) pain | Nausea or vomiting |
| Cloudy and bad smelling urine | Increased muscle spasms |
| Blood in urine | Chills |
| Frequent urine leaks | Autonomic Dysreflexia ¹ |

Bladder infection is a type of urinary tract infection or UTI.

¹ Autonomic dysreflexia affects people with injuries at or above T6. It is a medical emergency that should be treated right away. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Autonomic Dysreflexia](#) [handout](#).

Contact your Doctor or Nurse for more information.

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Diagnosis

Testing for a bladder infection is done through a urine test. Urine is tested for bacteria, white blood cells, and other chemicals. Sometimes, a doctor might do a bacteria culture to find out the best treatment to use.

It is common for people with spinal cord injury to have bacteria in the urine. If the bacteria are not making you sick, your doctor might not treat it. Using antibiotics too often can cause superbugs (antibiotic resistant bacteria). Superbugs are difficult to treat and can make you more sick.

Treatment

The main medical treatment for a bladder infection is antibiotics. In addition, drinking lots of water will help flush out your bladder. Taking vitamin C and cranberry juice is sometimes suggested. Vitamin C is good for your immune system. Cranberry juice has been suggested by some to help with bladder infections.

Clean or sterile technique: When using a catheter, make sure everything is very clean or sterile. Dirty catheters are a main cause of bladder infections.

Preventing Bladder Infections

If you use catheters, you are at high risk of bladder infections. Bacteria can get into your bladder through catheters that are not clean or through poor hygiene. Always use a clean or sterile technique when using a catheter.

Having urine in your bladder for a long time puts you at risk of bladder infections. This can be caused by having an overfull bladder or not fully emptying your bladder. Always keep a schedule for emptying your bladder. Try to have urine volumes of 400 to 600 mL each time. Make sure it is fully drained when emptying.

If you use a urine bag, make sure that tubes don't get bent or plugged. Always clean the connectors with alcohol swabs when connecting the bags. Also, make sure you clean your

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drainage bag frequently. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Cleaning your Drainage Bag](#) handout.

Other things you can do to prevent bladder infections include:

- Bathe regularly and keep good hygiene of your genital area.
- Stay hydrated. Drink 2-3 liters (8-12 cups) of fluid per day.
- Stay clean during bowel routines and after bowel accidents.

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