

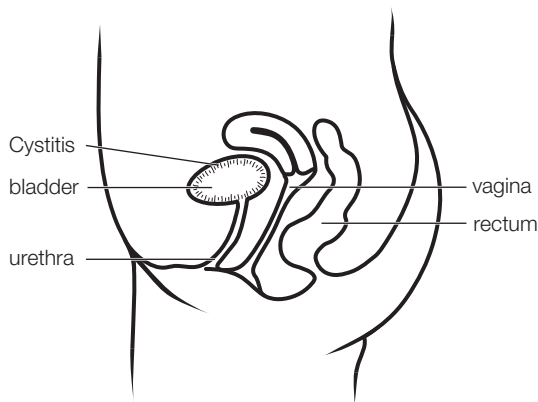
Cystitis in women

What is cystitis?

Cystitis is inflammation of the bladder, which is a very common problem; it is suffered by many women at some stage in their lives. The most vulnerable times are starting sexual activity (hence the term 'honeymoon cystitis'), during pregnancy and after menopause.

What causes cystitis?

It is almost always caused by bacteria (commonly *Escherichia coli*) travelling upwards along the rather short passage (the *urethra*) from the outside into the sterile bladder. This is often caused by intercourse, which pushes this short passage and bacteria upwards. These bacteria, which are present in the bowel, are normally found around the openings of the anus, vagina and urethra. The bladder soon learns to cope with these germs by a type of local immunity, but some women are prone to recurrent infections.



What are the symptoms?

- Burning or stinging when passing urine
- An urge to pass urine often
- Passing only small amounts of urine
- Discoloured and smelly urine
- Fever: pain in the back or low abdomen (may be present)
- Feeling generally unwell

What are the risks?

Cystitis is very uncomfortable and irritating, but is not a serious problem. An untreated infection can spread up to the kidneys, and this is serious.

What is the treatment?

Self-help

- Keep yourself rested and warm.
- Drink a lot of fluid: try 2 to 3 cups of water at first, and then 1 cup every 30 minutes.
- Try to empty your bladder completely each time.
- Gently wash or wipe your bottom from the front to the back with soft, moist tissues after going to the toilet.
- Take analgesics such as paracetamol for pain.
- Cranberry juice or capsules have been shown to alleviate mild urinary infection.

You should visit your doctor if the attack lasts more than 24 hours and bring a fresh specimen of urine, which you should collect after washing your vulva with clean cotton wool and water.

Medical help

You will be prescribed a course of antibiotics, which should all be taken. Your doctor may advise making the urine alkaline by using Ural or Citravescent or a teaspoon of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) in water. A follow-up urine test will be necessary. If the antibiotics do not work or if you have more attacks, some special tests (including X-rays) may be necessary to check your urinary tract.

How can you prevent further attacks?

- Get into the habit of drinking plenty of fluids, especially on hot days.
- Pass urine often and when you feel like it—do not let it build up.
- Make sure you empty your bladder each time.
- Wash your bottom gently after each bowel motion, using mild soap and soft tissues.
- Empty your bladder immediately after intercourse.
- If your vagina is dry, use lubrication for intercourse (KY jelly for young women and oestrogen cream after the menopause).
- Wear cotton underwear; avoid tight jeans and nylon pantyhose.
- Avoid the use of bubble baths and perfumed soaps, talcum powder and vaginal deodorants around the genital area.
- Cranberries as either juice or capsules have been shown to help prevent recurrences of urinary infection in those prone to getting it.