



Craig Hospital

Redefining Possible for People with Spinal Cord and Brain Injuries

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Urinary Tract Infection

What is a urinary tract infection?

A urinary tract infection occurs when there are bacteria in your bladder or kidneys that may disrupt your daily life.

What causes urinary tract infections?

Urinary tract infections (UTI) are caused by bacteria getting into your bladder and growing out of control. People who use catheters to help them urinate are at high risk for getting UTIs. The catheter provides a direct path for bacteria to enter your bladder. Often, bacteria live in your bladder without any problems; this is called colonization. Sometimes, the bacteria increases and they may cause a urinary tract infection.

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

- ✓ Increased spasms
- ✓ Autonomic dysreflexia
- ✓ Mild low back pain or other aches
- ✓ Feeling tired
- ✓ Fever or Chills
- ✓ Urinary leakage or having to catheterize more often
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ Headache
- ✓ Blood or sediment in the urine
- ✓ Cloudy urine or a foul odor to the urine
 - ✓ *Cloudy, foul smelling urine may be due to changes in diet and fluid intake. With no other symptoms, this is not a reason to take antibiotics for a UTI.*

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How do I prevent a urinary tract infection?

The best way to prevent a UTI is to drink lots of fluids. You should drink at least 64 oz of fluids a day, especially water. It is best to avoid beverages with sugar, caffeine and alcohol. These drinks may increase bladder irritation and contribute to UTIs.

Some people believe that cranberry pills can help reduce UTIs by changing the chemistry of the urine and stopping bacteria from clinging to the bladder wall. Clinical research on the effectiveness of cranberry is mixed – some studies support the use of cranberry and some studies do not. However, many people report a decreased frequency of UTIs when using cranberry pills.

If you decide to take cranberry to help reduce the number of UTIs, we recommend taking the cranberry pill and not cranberry juice. Cranberry juice contains a lot of sugar and calories. Blended juices (cran-grape, cran-apple, etc.) do not offer enough cranberry ingredients to have any benefit. Talk with your doctor about any medications or herbal supplements before taking them.

Sometimes your doctor will recommend vitamin C, which can make your bladder more acidic which can help prevent or treat your UTI. Talk with your doctor about any medications or herbal supplements before taking them.

If you have an indwelling catheter, in general, it should be changed on a monthly basis. It may need to be changed more often if you get frequent UTIs or produce a lot of sediment or crystals in your urine. Talk with your doctor about the schedule that is right for you.

Keeping the catheter and insertion site clean is also very important. If you have an indwelling catheter, clean the catheter and the insertion site in the morning and at night with soap and water. If you use intermittent catheterization, wash your hands and insertion site before touching the catheter and do not let the catheter touch anything before or during insertion. For instructions on proper technique, talk with your doctor or nurse.

I think I have a UTI, when should I call my healthcare provider?

Since it is common to have bacteria colonized in your bladder when you use a catheter, antibiotics are not recommended unless you have a fever (temperature greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit) or if your signs and symptoms are limiting your ability to participate in normal activities.

If I have a UTI, what will my healthcare provider do?

Your provider will ask about signs and symptoms and whether you have any drug allergies. They will collect a urine sample before ordering any antibiotics. This sample will help determine which antibiotic to prescribe. Because antibiotic resistance is a growing problem, **antibiotics should be avoided unless you have significant symptoms of a UTI or a significant level of bacteria in the urine.** If you take antibiotics it is very important you take the entire amount prescribed even if you start to feel better.

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What do I need to know about antibiotic treatment?

- To make sure the bacteria is destroyed it is important to take all of the medication you are prescribed.
- Do not take any antibiotics prior to giving a urine culture, as this will make the results incorrect and harder to treat your infection.
- You should always change your catheter midway through an antibiotic treatment. The new catheter prevents re-colonization of bacteria from the old catheter.
- When you have completed your antibiotics, it is not necessary to get a repeat culture unless your signs and symptoms have not improved.

How do I collect a urine sample from a catheter?

- The best method of collecting a urine sample is to change your catheter and collect urine immediately from the new, sterile catheter.
- If it is not possible to change your catheter, urine can be taken directly from the indwelling catheter.
- You should never collect a urine sample from your leg bag or night bag.
- Urine for a urinalysis and a culture should be kept cool or refrigerated and be delivered within 2 hours of collection to your doctor or lab.

Notify your healthcare provider if you develop any symptoms related to a urinary tract infection.