

# Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

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- A urinary tract infection (UTI) can happen when bacteria (germs) get into the urinary tract. The urinary tract is made up of:
  - › Kidneys
  - › Ureters (tubes that carry urine [pee] to the bladder)
  - › Bladder
  - › Urethra (tube that carries pee out of the body)
- UTIs are not transmitted sexually (partners **do not** spread the bacteria to each other during sex).
- **Possible signs of infection:**
  - › Feeling you need to pee more often
  - › Feeling you need to pee, but then cannot
  - › Pain, pressure, or a burning feeling when peeing
  - › Bad-smelling, bloody, cloudy, or dark pee
  - › Lower abdomen (stomach area) cramps
  - › Lower back pain
- People with a UTI and a neurological condition (like MS or paraplegia) may have different symptoms than those listed above.

## How is a UTI treated?

- If you have a UTI, your health care provider will likely prescribe an antibiotic medication. Antibiotics attack bacteria.

## What can I do to help?

- **Take your medication as told by your health care provider.**
- Take your medication until it is all gone, even if you start to feel better.
- Drink lots of fluids while taking your medication. This can help flush (get rid of) the bacteria that cause a UTI.



Ask your health care provider what amount of fluids is safe for you. You may not be able to drink more fluids if you:

- › Have certain medical conditions
- › Are taking certain medications

- For most people, drinking pure cranberry juice (not cranberry cocktail) can help to get rid of the infection sooner by making your pee acidic. Acidic pee slows the growth of bacteria.

Ask your health care provider if cranberry juice is safe for you. You may not be able to drink cranberry juice if you:

- › Have certain medical conditions
- › Are taking certain medications (like blood thinners)

## What can I do to help with pain?

- Try to pee often. This helps to flush your urinary tract and get rid of the bacteria causing the infection.
- Sit in a warm tub filled only with water. **Do not add liquid soap or bath oil.** These products can make your infection worse.
- Clean your genital area using a soft face cloth and warm water only 2 times a day. If you must use soap, only use unscented soap.
- For back pain, put a warm water bottle or a heating pad on your lower back or lower abdomen for 10 minutes at a time.

## To lower your chance of a UTI:

- Make sure you have enough fluids. Try to drink 1.5 L or 6 8-ounce glasses of fluids (like water) a day (unless your health care provider says not to).
- **Do not** wait too long to pee. Go as soon as you feel the urge.
- Pee shortly before and after having sex.
- Always wipe from front to back after peeing.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- **Do not** wear tight pants, panty hose, tights, or leggings for long periods of time.
- **Do not** wear panty liners when you are not having your period.
- **Do not** use vaginal cleansers or douches.
- If you think you may be perimenopausal or if you are post-menopausal, talk to your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) about the benefits of vaginal estrogen.
- Talk to your primary health care provider about the benefits of high-quality cranberry supplements.

**Call your primary health care provider if:**

- › your symptoms get worse, even after taking your medication as told.
- › there is blood in your pee.
- › you have a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) or chills.
- › you have pain in your back or lower back, or on your side between your upper abdomen (stomach area) and your back.
- › you have more pain, or the pain moves to a different part of your body.
- **If you cannot reach your primary health care provider, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

# Notes:

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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