

A-Z
cystitis

Want to know how to deal with recurrent bouts of infection? Lorraine Sathicq asks the experts



Cystitis affects more than 30 per cent of Australian women at least once in their lifetime. Cystitis refers to the bacterial urinary tract infection (UTI) that causes inflammation of the bladder. Symptoms include frequency of urination and pain.



ANTIBIOTICS
 These are the quickest and best way to kill the bugs that cause bacterial cystitis. People with mild infection may not always need them but antibiotics are the best way to treat the severe symptoms that can appear. – SP

THE EXPERTS

- Adelaide urologist Samantha Pillay – SP
- Sydney holistic GP Dr Michael Elstein – ME
- Brisbane homoeopath Dennis Ryan – DR

BOWEL HABITS
 Constipation is a risk factor for urine infection. It increases the number of bacteria in the area and can interfere with normal bladder function. Avoid constipation by eating plenty of fibre and exercising. – SP

COMPLICATIONS
 If bladder infections are left untreated it can progress to sepsis and even death. Elderly people, children and people who have suppressed immune systems are at increased risk of complications. – SP

DIET
 Studies show women who drink cranberry juice or took capsules were less likely to get cystitis over the next 12 months.

A US study says drinking cranberry juice may help ward off a bladder infection, but there's no evidence that it will treat it once an infection is established.







ELECTROLYTES

Sachets, available over the counter at the pharmacy, can reduce the acid content of urine and relieve burning but drinking juices or eating fruit with high acid content will have the opposite effect. – **SP**

FINDING OUT

Your doctor can determine if you have bacterial cystitis by ordering a urinalysis. The specimen is known as clean-catch midstream. After gently cleaning the area around the urethra and passing the first bit of urine into the toilet, the middle part is collected in a sterile jar to minimise contamination from external bugs. – **SP**

HORMONES

The oestrogen depletion that accompanies menopause can also cause thinning of the tissues around the vagina

GO NATURAL

There are homoeopathic remedies for cystitis. One is called staphisagria, which works by stimulating your own immune system and can provide relief within hours of taking it. If you're prone to honeymoon cystitis this remedy can stop severe symptoms from appearing at all. – **DR**

and urethra. Women who find they have more infections as a result may consider HRT, perhaps in the form of vaginal pessaries or topical creams. – **SP**

IMMUNITY

Bugs love sugar, so a reduced carb diet, choosing low-GI foods to

help maintain stable blood sugar levels is best.

Avoid caffeine because it's a diuretic, which means it can cause you to lose nutrients such as zinc and magnesium, both important to immune function. – **ME**

LOOK AHEAD

If you have regular bouts of bacterial cystitis, ask your doctor about self-start antibiotics. If you have some antibiotics on hand you can start treatment as soon as symptoms appear and possibly have relief in only hours.

It may only require three days if you start the antibiotics early enough. But it's best to keep taking the antibiotics for at least 24 hours after the symptoms settle down. – **SP**

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Not everyone with a urinary infection ends up seeing a doctor.

Increasing your water intake may help fix your problem if your symptoms are very mild. But it's important to seek treatment with antibiotics if symptoms do not improve within a few hours or are worsening.

Similarly, if you are not improving quickly after starting antibiotics you should see your doctor straightaway. – **SP**

ONIONS

If you're prone to cystitis your immune system may not be working as well as it should. Eat onions. They are a good source of flavonoids, which help boost immunity.

Other sources of flavonoids include apples, cherries and green tea. – **ME**

KEEP HYDRATED

Extra water will help dilute the bacterial load and flush it from your system. Some women who have a mild infection find drinking extra water is all they need. It's important to be well hydrated if you have an infection, no matter where it is in your body. Dehydration will make matters worse, so avoid caffeine and alcohol. – **SP**





TOILET HABITS

You can help prevent bladder infections by not being constipated, and wiping from front to back to avoid introducing bowel bacteria in to the vagina and the urethra. – SP



PERSONAL HYGIENE

Tampons are fine to use but some people find they reduce their ability to empty their bladders properly, which can allow bacteria to multiply.

Some women tend to wash too much, and that can aggravate the skin and disrupt the natural flora in the area. But there's no need to go overboard with soap, perfumed products or panty liners. – SP

RECURRENT INFECTIONS

Some women have one-off infections and need only see their GP for treatment while others have more than their fair share of repeat infections. A specialist can order tests to rule out more sinister causes. In the majority of cases they

don't find a reason, so it's thought that genetic factors are involved but there are some serious less common problems that should be excluded. – SP

SEX

Sex is definitely a trigger for cystitis in some women, which is why it's often called 'honeymoon' cystitis. Every woman has bugs in her urethra and every woman will have those bugs pushed towards the bladder when she has intercourse. Although condoms are

okay, spermicidal gels and diaphragms are known to increase the risk of urine infection. Make sure you pass urine soon after sex. It helps flush out any bacteria in the urethra; going to sleep straightaway gives the bugs more time to proliferate. – SP

URINE

It's important not to hover over the toilet or try to stop the flow of urine once you get started – both can prevent you from emptying your bladder efficiently and can raise your chances of infection. Cloudy or red-tinged urine could indicate infection but it could also mean something else is wrong, so it's always best to see your doctor. – SP

VAGINA

The vagina is a self-cleaning organ with its own natural flora. Because they are so close, bugs that live in the vagina can also get into the urethra. Unperfumed

soaps and cotton underwear are recommended. Douching is a bad idea, especially if you're prone to infections because it can interfere with the balance of healthy bacteria in the vagina. – SP


YOGA

Relaxation, meditation and yoga are other effective strategies. The hormone cortisol, often associated with stress, is also important to immune function. If your cortisol levels are depleted from too much stress it can weaken the immune system and indirectly contribute to all kinds of infections. – ME

ZINC

Zinc is an important mineral for the immune system: it helps the body fight infection and also helps prevent recurrence of infections such as cystitis. Zinc is recognised for its anti-infectious properties – it can help to prevent an infection from taking hold.

Look for supplements which contain zinc. +



WOMEN

Females have more urinary infections than males simply because the bacteria have a shorter distance to travel. A woman's urethra is about 4cm in length and a man's is about 20cm. The shorter distance means it's easier for bacteria to get into the bladder. – SP

FOR MORE INFORMATION ● Dr Samantha Pillay www.continencematters.com ● Your Health www.yourhealth.com.au ● Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au ● Dr Michael Elstein www.eternalhealth.org/