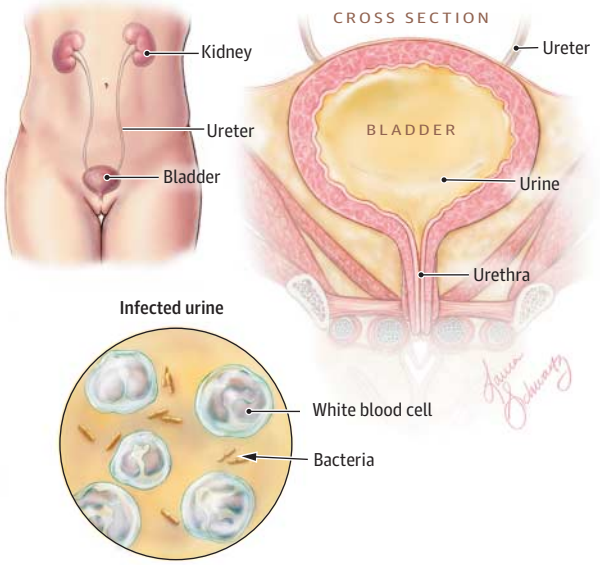
Urinary Tract Infections in Older Women

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are common, especially in older women.

Your urinary tract is made up of the bladder, the urethra, the ureters, and the kidneys. Urine is made by the kidneys. It then passes through the ureters to the bladder. It is stored in the bladder before leaving your body through the urethra.

Urinary tract anatomy



What Is a UTI?

Having a UTI means that germs (bacteria) in your urine are causing symptoms. If you have a UTI, you will need medical treatment.

What Are the Symptoms of a UTI?

You should tell your doctor if

- You feel burning when you pass urine
- You need to pass urine more often than usual
- You have more leakage of urine than usual
- You see blood in your urine

Drinking more water or other fluids might relieve some of these symptoms. But if you have these symptoms, you should still tell your doctor.

What Will My Doctor Do If I Have These Symptoms?

These symptoms might mean that you have a UTI. But they also might be a sign of another condition. For example, you might have loss of bladder control. To find out the cause of your symptoms, your doctor will examine you.

Your doctor also might order tests of your urine. One such test is called a **urinalysis**. This test looks for germs and signs of infection (white blood cells). Another such test is called a **urine culture**. This test can tell your doctor 2 things. First, it can tell what kind of germs you have in your urine. Second, it can tell what medicine you should take to help get rid of the germs.

Your doctor might order tests of your blood, especially if

- You have a fever
- You have pain in your lower back
- You are throwing up

These symptoms can mean that your UTI is more serious.

What else do I need to know?

- You probably will only need to take medicine for 3 days. But your doctor will tell you how long you should take your medicine.
- You should drink lots of water or other fluids. This is especially important if you have had 3 or more UTIs in a year.
- You can help prevent UTIs by passing urine after you have sex. This is especially important if you often get UTIs after having sex.
- If you no longer have periods, you might prevent UTIs by using vaginal estrogen preparations. But estrogen is not safe for all women. Your doctor might suggest using estrogen if it is safe for you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse *www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov*
- Urology Care Foundation *www.urologyhealth.org*
- American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists *www.acog.org*

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