

Your guide to women's health and wellbeing

What do you know about...

Vaginal health

PMS

Period pains

Cystitis



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Edinburgh office

Woodburn House
Canaan Lane
Edinburgh EH10 4SG

Glasgow office

Elphinstone House
65 West Regent Street
Glasgow G2 2AF

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Your guide to women's health and wellbeing

What do you know about...Cystitis

Many women get cystitis; around 1 in 3 women will experience cystitis at some point in their lives. This leaflet looks at treating it yourself and when to see a doctor.

Q. What is cystitis?

A. Cystitis means your bladder is inflamed. This can be caused by infection from germs from your bowels or urine stagnating in your bladder.

It might also be due to wearing clothes that are too tight, or using perfumed bubble bath, soap or talcum powder that irritate your skin.

Suspect cystitis if you:

- urgently and frequently need to go to the toilet to pass urine
- can only pass small amounts of urine, and it hurts when you do
- feel feverish and generally unwell
- have a dull ache in your stomach and back.

Q. What can help?


A. If you're worried or it's your first time, get advice from your GP, but cystitis often clears up on its own after a few days. There are also things you can do to make yourself more comfortable until it does:

- Take mild painkillers for the pain and to reduce a temperature.
- A hot water bottle laid on your stomach or sitting at the base of your back may be soothing.
- Sex can further irritate cystitis – you may want to avoid sex until the cystitis has gone.
- Cutting down on caffeine and alcohol, sticking to a low-acid diet (no spicy food or citrus fruits) and simple remedies (like taking bicarbonate of soda mixed with water) can stop the burning feeling when you go to the toilet.
- Drinking lots of water may help flush out the infection, though this means you'll need to go to the toilet even more.

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You can also reduce the risk of getting cystitis in future:

- Maintain personal hygiene but don't overdo it. Too much washing, especially with perfumed products, can damage the skin and allow germs to thrive. Take showers instead of baths for less contact with chemicals.
- After going to the toilet, always wipe yourself from front to back to avoid transferring germs from your bowels to your bladder.
- Drink plenty of fluids and go to the toilet when you need to – try not to 'hang on' or stop mid-stream as this gives germs a chance to linger and cause infections.
- Cotton underwear and looser-fitting trousers all reduce the risk of irritation.
- Cranberry juice contains a natural antibiotic and may prevent cystitis.

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- Some women get cystitis after sex, possibly because it damages the skin or transfers germs. There's less risk of infection if you use lubricating jelly during sex and empty your bladder before and straight after sex.

Ask your local pharmacist or practice nurse for advice. Some over-the-counter and natural remedies may not be suitable if you're taking other medication.

Q. Should I see my GP?

A. Go to your GP if:

- This is the first time you've had cystitis and it doesn't improve within 24 hours.
- You have a high temperature, severe stomach, groin or back pain or blood in your urine. These can be signs the cystitis has spread to your kidneys.
- You get cystitis while you're pregnant. Antibiotics will prevent possible complications for you or your baby.
- You keep getting cystitis.

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Your doctor can carry out tests to identify the cause of frequent or severe attacks, and rule out other infections with similar symptoms.

Antibiotics and other treatments prescribed by your GP will help flush out your bladder and clear the cystitis. Taking a low-dose antibiotic daily can stop recurrent attacks. The doctor will advise on whether treatment will affect other medication and contraception.

A healthy lifestyle will boost your immune system, so it's easier to resist infections like cystitis in future.



Further information

**Cystitis and Overactive
Bladder Foundation**
www.cobfoundation.org

Menopause Matters
www.menopausematters.co.uk

NHS 24
www.nhs24.com