



# Lavatory Agony

## Lifestyle Tips to Keep Urinary Tract Infections Away

The tell-tale signs of a urinary tract infection are always unpleasant. You feel like you need to urinate more often, but it burns when you do. Even though urinary tract infections are easily treatable, they can become a real pain if you experience them on a frequent basis.

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is when any part of your body that deals with urine becomes infected. These body parts include the bladder, kidneys, ureters and urethra. The ureters are tubes that carry urine from your kidneys to your bladder and the urethra is a tube that carries the urine out of your body. UTI is usually caused by *E. coli*, a bacteria that normally resides in the lower intestine.

Women usually get more UTIs compared to men. The biggest reason for this is because the female urethra is much shorter in length compared to the men's. Changes like pregnancy, constipation and menopause can also contribute to the development of a UTI. For younger women, the most common cause of UTIs is sexual activity.

can actually make you more prone to getting a UTI. I recall seeing a case of UTI in a young air stewardess who would try to avoid using the toilet during long haul flights!

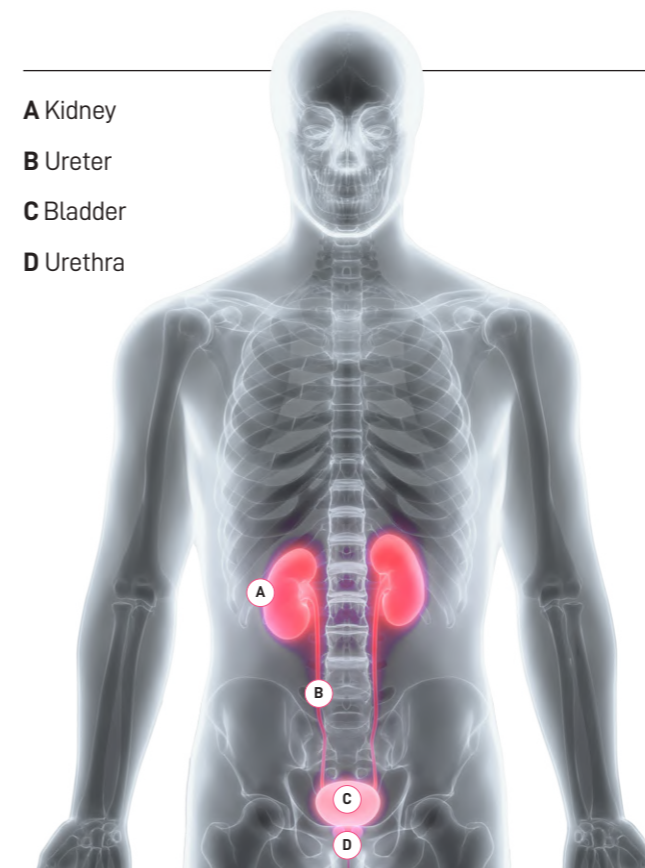
To overcome this particular problem, be sure to get to the bathroom as soon as you are able to. If you are prone to UTIs and you work in an environment where bathroom breaks are discouraged, you can ask for a doctor's note explaining that you need to be allowed more frequent breaks.

You may also want to make sure that faecal matter stays far away from the opening of your urethra. Women should always wipe from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria.

### 3. Stop Avoiding Dirty Public Toilets

Picture this: You are bursting to use the toilet, but the nearest public toilets are so dirty that you cannot bear the thought of sitting on one to pee. In such circumstances, there are few good choices available. Some women may compromise by wiping down the toilet seat with paper before use, while others may prefer to hover in a semi-squat without actually touching the toilet. There are even some women who may carry and use urination devices that allow them to stand and pee.

Most women usually make the simple common sense decision to hold in their pee until they get home. Unfortunately, this last option is probably also a contributory factor to UTI. Unclean toilets can cause an infection, but the solution is not "holding it in". In fact, "holding it in" is more likely to cause you problems in the future as they may result in UTI. We are fortunate to be



- A Kidney
- B Ureter
- C Bladder
- D Urethra

Fortunately, the causes of UTI are not random. By making a few simple lifestyle changes, you can reduce the frequency of these infections. We shall now take a look at some of the things that you can do to help keep your urinary tract healthy.

### 1. Staying Hydrated

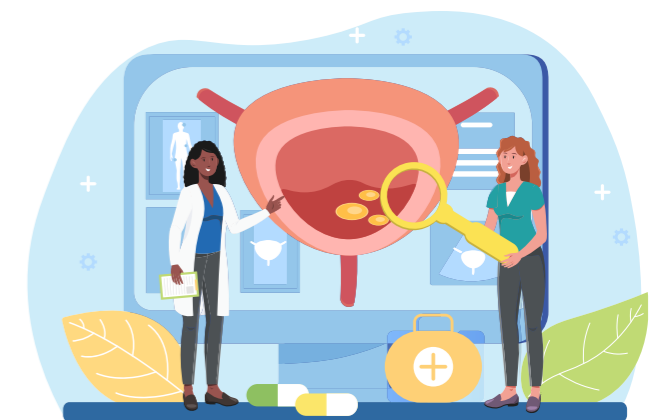
Drink as much fluids as you can. This is not just a cliché that you hear from doctors and other health experts. The simplest way to prevent a UTI is to flush the bacteria out of the bladder before it can set in. If you are well-hydrated, it will be tough to go too long without urinating. The Harvard Institute of Medicine recommends that women take in about 2.2 litres of liquids daily, which is about 9 cups. Not all of this needs to come from water. Fruits and vegetables, which form part of a healthy diet, also contain a lot of water.



### 2. Managing Your Bathroom Habits

There are many situations where we cannot use the restroom as soon as we feel the urge. Certain jobs, in particular, limit bathroom access. Unfortunately, having to "hold" for too long

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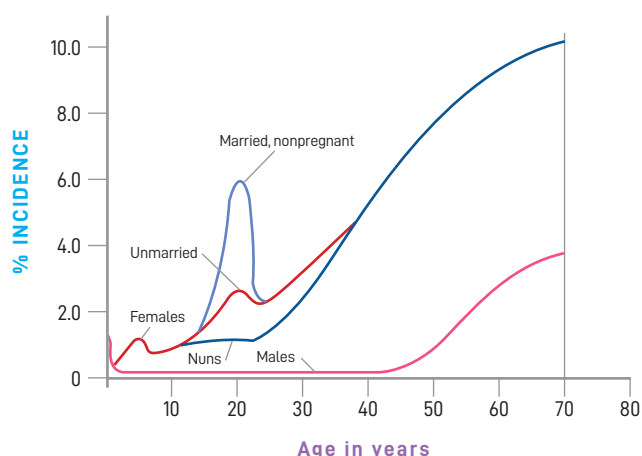


living in Singapore where public toilets are generally quite clean. Thus, doing away with the perception that public toilets are dirty and unusable even when you have an urge to pee is actually better for your health in the long run.

#### 4. Preventing UTI When Sexually Active

You do not have to stop having sex to prevent UTIs. Here are some steps that you can take to minimize bacteria build-up and reduce your risk of getting UTIs from sex.

- Urinate before sex and promptly after. This will flush your system and keep bacteria that has entered your urinary tract from gaining a foothold.
- Clean your genital and anal areas (wiping front to back only) before and after sex.



The age and gender distribution of urinary tract infection incidence

From Devine CJ, Stecker JF. *Urology in Practice*. Boston: Little, Brown; 1978. p. 444.

#### 5. Avoid Over Cleaning and Use Scented Products with Caution

In my clinical practice, I have encountered quite a number of female patients who routinely use the shower head to “douche” their private parts. Douching is washing or cleaning out the inside of the vagina with water or other mixtures of fluids. This can inadvertently introduce bacteria up your urinary tract instead.

Many personal care products also contain heavy fragrances that can irritate your urinary tract. Avoid scented body washes, lotions, douches and feminine hygiene products as these can irritate your urinary tract. Sometimes, these products can also change the pH level of your body, making infections more likely.

#### 6. Try Taking Cranberry Supplements

Cranberries contain a natural compound (proanthocyanidins) that helps keep the bacteria that cause UTIs away from your urinary tract. You can try drinking lots of cranberry juice when you feel the tell-tale symptoms of a UTI coming.

Choose 100% cranberry juice because cranberry juice “cocktails” contain other juices, such as apple juice or white grape juice, so they contain less of the helpful active cranberry compounds.

Finally, although evidence from clinical studies is not conclusive on the use of cranberry juice to reduce the risk of UTIs, taking in cranberries may still be helpful. It definitely cannot hurt!

If you follow these tips, practice good hygiene habits and make sure to drink plenty of water, you can help to keep your urinary tract healthy and avoid painful UTIs.

#### SEEING A DOCTOR

If treated early, there should be no complications from a UTI. It is okay to seek medical help when you have active UTI as an untreated UTI can spread upwards in your urinary tract and affect your kidneys. Your doctor will usually choose an antibiotic based on your medical history, type of UTI and previous urine culture sensitivities.

Sometimes, a UTI can be self-limiting in women, meaning that the body can fight the infection without antibiotics. However, most uncomplicated UTIs can be treated quickly with a short course of oral antibiotics. UTI treatment without antibiotics is usually not recommended. **PRIME**



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