Ouch! Burning pee! Is this a urinary tract infection (UTI)?

Alice,

I think I may have some kind of urinary tract infection. It came on very suddenly, about three nights ago. And when I pee, there is a burning sensation when my bladder has almost emptied. It's not an STD because I'm in a monogamous relationship, and yes, I'm sure! Please help. Thank you.

? Burning Up

Answer

Dear Burning Up,

It seems as though you may be in a common yet uncomfortable situation. In fact, urinary tract infections (UTIs) are so common that most women and some men get at least one at some point in their lives. They are usually caused by bacteria (many different types of bacteria), such as \( E.\ coli \), which travel from the colon to the urethra and bladder (and occasionally the kidneys). Trichomoniasis and chlamydia (sexually transmitted infections) can also cause UTIs, as can stress, a suppressed immune system, poor diet, damage to the urethra from childbirth, and surgery. A sudden increase in sexual activity could also trigger a case of "honeymoon cystitis," just another name for a urinary tract infection.

Cystitis is the most common form of UTI. It is rarely serious if treated. Symptoms may include:

- Feeling like you need to pee every few minutes
- Burning when you try to pee
- Needing to pee with hardly anything coming out
- Cloudy, dark, or bloody urine
- Pain in your lower back or abdomen
- Women may feel pressure above the pubic bone; men may feel fullness in the rectum
- Strong odor to your morning's first pee
- Feeling bad or uneasy overall

To prevent UTIs, treat mild infections, and avoid recurrence, try the following self-help measures:
Drink lots of fluids every day.
Urinate frequently, emptying your bladder completely each time.
Wipe yourself from front to back after a bowel movement to keep bowel bacteria away from your urethra (for women).
Wash hands before having sex, and after contact with the anus and before touching the vagina.
Make sure you are well-lubed before and during intercourse.
Pee before and after sex.
For women, change sanitary napkins and tampons frequently during your period.
Cut down on or eliminate caffeine, alcohol, and sweets.
Eat well and get enough rest.
Manage your stress.
Wear loose clothing.
Drink unsweetened cranberry juice or take cranberry supplements in pill or powder form.

When a UTI doesn't respond to self-help treatment within twenty-four hours, recurs frequently, or is accompanied by a fever, it's time to see a health care provider. Treatment is usually a course of antibiotics and is determined by the particular type of bacteria. Over-the-counter or prescription pain relievers can relieve discomfort, and some patients report that a heating pad is helpful. Untreated UTIs can lead to serious infections of the kidneys, so if pain and symptoms persist, make sure you see a provider.

This common condition is certainly not pleasant; however, it is common and treatable. By tuning in to your body and following the care tips listed above, you can get on the path to fewer UTIs in the future.

Alice!
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