

Urinary-yeast infection cycle? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I'm really stressed out because I've been getting recurring urinary tract infections coupled with yeast infections for the last six months. I'm not sexually active and I've been to two urologists and a gynecologist — they've all given me medication but the problems always turn up again. Is one problem causing the other? Can these prolonged problems be doing serious damage to my body? Perhaps you can't answer my questions either, but I'm really at my wit's end. What do I do? I'm tired of doctors and embarrassing exams and I can't understand why this is happening if I'm not having sex. Also, I'm a senior and in five weeks I'm out of health insurance — extending my parent's policy is very expensive and not an option. I'm busy trying to set up interviews, finish a thesis, and do a million things — I don't have time to be running around to more doctors' appointments! What insurance options are there for recent graduates?

Signed, Desperate for Health Care Options

Answer

Dear Desperate for Health Care Options,

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are very common, and are not always caused by sexual contact. In fact, they're usually caused by bacteria that travel from the colon to the urethra and bladder. Cystitis (inflammation or infection of the bladder) is by far the most common UTI, characterized by such symptoms as feeling the constant need to pee (even though not much urine is expelled), as well as burning upon urination. UTIs usually respond to antibiotics, and health care providers commonly prescribe drugs, such as ampicillin, nitrofurantoin, tetracycline, or sulfonamides. Antibiotics, however, in their effective destruction of bacteria throughout the body, commonly upset the pH balance of the vagina. Removing good bacteria from the vagina provides yeast, which naturally exists in your vagina in a small amount, with the chance to proliferate. Symptoms of a yeast infection include vaginal itching, thick white discharge (often cottage cheese-like), and, sometimes, a smell similar to baking bread. It must be said that both UTIs and yeast infections can be stress-related, and from the last few sentences in your question, it sounds like you've been having your share lately.

Concerning the antibiotics for your UTI, make sure you take the full dosage for the full amount of

days. Taking the pills for three or four days will cause symptoms to subside, but will not wipe out the bacteria. In fact, taking anything less than the full dosage could easily cause one or more recurrences.

For the yeast infections, some women have had success with the following home remedies:

- A garlic suppository (a peeled garlic clove wrapped in gauze that's inserted in the vagina)
- A tampon dipped into a 3 percent solution of potassium sorbate (15 grams of dry potassium sorbate in one pint of water) — a common preservative in the home brewing of beer — that's inserted in the vagina at night and removed in the morning

Also, when starting the antibiotics for the UTI, eating plain yogurt or taking acidophilus in capsules, liquid, or granule form can help replace your normal bacteria.

In between recurrences, there are lots of recommendations for preventing more UTIs and/or yeast infections:

- Drink lots of fluid everyday (for an active infection, drink enough to pour out a good stream of urine every hour).
- Urinate frequently and don't try to hold a full bladder.
- Wipe from front to back and wash your genital area with plain water at least once a day.
- If you use sanitary napkins during your period, change them frequently.
- Wear cotton underpants and avoid tight jeans or clothing that cuts in the crotch.
- Avoid or ease up on caffeine and alcohol, which can irritate the bladder.
- Try drinking unsweetened cranberry juice, which makes your urine more acidic and helps to prevent both UTIs and yeast infections (yeast can't thrive in acidic environments).
- Avoid refined sugar, plain and simple. And if you can't avoid sweets, cut down substantially.
- Keep up your resistance by eating well, resting well, and finding ways to reduce the stress in your life.

As far as insurance options after you graduate, it will depend on where you live, where you work, your prior health history, etc. Check out [Health insurance options after college](#) [2] for more information. If you need to take care of gynecological problems in a hurry after you graduate, look for a local [Planned Parenthood](#) [3]. Services are usually reasonably priced, and they may even have a sliding scale fee.

Alice!

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