Dear Alice,

For the second time this year, I have had a bout of what I think might be a urinary tract infection, but I'm not sure if that's what it is. For about a week now I have had the urgency to urinate hundreds of times throughout the day, and could easily urinate every five minutes without problem. The bothersome thing is that, although I'm not incontinent, it is dripping a little and is therefore very unpleasant and awkward. I'm not experiencing any burning sensation, and I know that I'm not pregnant. Any advice? (I started drinking cranberry juice yesterday, thinking that might help I'm not exactly sure why).

Thanks,
Slightly embarrassed.

Answer

Dear Slightly embarrassed,

The urge to pee multiple times per day sounds like it must be irritating! Although it may feel awkward and unpleasant, you're certainly not the first person to experience this, so there's no need to be embarrassed. The frequent urination you describe could be caused by a variety of factors, not just a urinary tract infection (UTI). Though the research is limited, there are some folks who've found relief with cranberry juice (more on this in a bit). In any case, talking with your health care provider to determine the cause will likely provide answers for how to get some long-term relief.

The frequent urination you describe could be due to a number of different issues including:

- Infection, disease, injury, or irritation of the bladder
- Conditions that increase urine production such as pregnancy or bladder stones
- Changes in muscles, nerves, or other tissues affecting bladder function
- Certain cancer treatments
- Drugs or beverages that increase urine production
You mention the possibility of a u-tract infection (a.k.a. urinary tract infection), which is a common infection usually caused by bacteria entering your urinary tract and is treated with antibiotics. The symptoms often vary based on the individual, but common symptoms include:

- Feeling like you have to urinate all of the time
- Pain or burning when you do urinate
- Blood in your urine

There are a number of factors that increase the risk of UTIs. Conditions such as diabetes, bowel incontinence, urinary catheters, kidney stones, pregnancy, or urinary tract surgery have been shown to increase the likelihood of developing a UTI. Individuals who are assigned female at birth and use diaphragms or spermicide as birth control or are experiencing menopause may find that they're at increased risk as well. On the other hand, those with a penis are at a decreased risk because they have a longer urethra and it’s farther from the anus, thus reducing the chance of germs entering the urethra.

Slightly embarrassed, you’re not alone in reaching for the cranberry juice! Whether in juice, powder, or pill form, some people find relief using cranberry juice as a treatment for UTIs. To avoid a UTI in the first place, it’s best to drink lots of water, wipe from front to back when you go to the bathroom, urinate after sex, avoid irritating feminine products such as deodorant sprays or douches, and switch from diaphragms, spermicide, or unlubricated condoms to other forms of birth control (you can learn more about various birth control methods in the Contraception category of the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health archives).

In addition, it might be wise to work with a health care provider rule out any other infections that cause symptoms similar to a UTI including:

- Chlamydia, which is a bacterial infection of the genital tract, may cause painful urination and lower abdominal pain.
- Gonorrhea may cause painful urination, but may also cause frequent urination and some discharge.

Even if you’re not in pain and it’s just an inconvenience at this point, it’s wise to get tested sooner rather than later. Untreated infections can worsen and may lead to serious illness. Your provider will be able to help you figure out ways to prevent these problems in the future. Although you may be embarrassed now, getting help is a critical step to finding relief. Just think — won’t it be nice to not always be on the lookout for the nearest bathroom?!

Alice!
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Sexual & Reproductive Health
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI’s)
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