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# Chronic Cystitis – The Urinary Tract Infection Impersonator in Women

by ROBERT PUGACH, MD

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) are among one of the most common health problems in women. For millions of women, UTIs are much more than a nuisance - they cause discomfort, lost time from work, and require medical visits. Approximately, 40 percent of women and 12 percent of men will experience at least one symptomatic urinary tract infection during their lifetime. However, UTIs, if not properly treated, will recur.

**The symptoms of a UTI include:**

Frequency • Urgency • Burning • Nighttime Urination

I'm often asked why women are more prone to UTIs. The answer is simply due to anatomy. Because women have shorter urethras than men, bacteria have a shorter distance to travel to reach the bladder. Large numbers of bacteria always inhabit the surface of the skin and, oftentimes, are in the urethra. It's a short journey for bacteria to travel from the urethral opening into the bladder in women, often resulting in a urinary infection.

Many of my patients are surprised to learn that the normal mechanism for preventing infections is uri-

nating. This washes bacteria out of our urethra several times every day and keeps them from entering the bladder. However, several factors can combine to allow bacteria to reach the bladder. These include a low fluid intake, dehydration, perspiration, lack of good personal hygiene and hormonal changes.

Hormonal changes also cause another phenomenon - urethral changes that can cause chronic UTI symptoms without having an actual bladder infection. Decreased estrogen levels cause the urethra and surrounding vaginal tissue to decrease in size. These changes cause significant urethral narrowing which, in turn, affect the bladder and can cause chronic inflammation and bladder muscle irritability.

In my practice, I see many female patients who have been diagnosed with UTIs and treated with multiple courses of antibiotics even though their urine cultures are negative. A urinalysis may show some red or white blood cells but no bacteria. The typical result of antibiotic treatment is short term relief of symptoms followed by their prompt return. A very frustrating and seemingly never ending cycle for many women!

At Pacific Coast Urology Medical Center we educate our patients that the correct medical terminology for this condition is urethral stenosis and chronic cystitis. That translates to a narrow urethra and long standing bladder inflammation. I treat this condition with a two minute in-office procedure that gently stretches the urethra to bring it back to its original size. Sometimes, estrogen cream is used to soften the urethra before dilating it and antibiotics may be prescribed to help the bladder heal. The after effects are typically some mild burning with urination for 1-2 days. A short time afterwards, the symptoms of frequent, urgent or nighttime urination and burning dissipate and urination returns to normal. Our patients report a dramatic relief!



*We specialize in many bladder control problems in women – chronic cystitis is just one of them. For a comprehensive evaluation and treatment of urinating problems including true UTIs, urgency, incontinence, frequency, burning and nighttime urination, contact us at Pacific Coast Urology Medical Center. Relief is just a phone call away!*

Call today - 888-735-4336