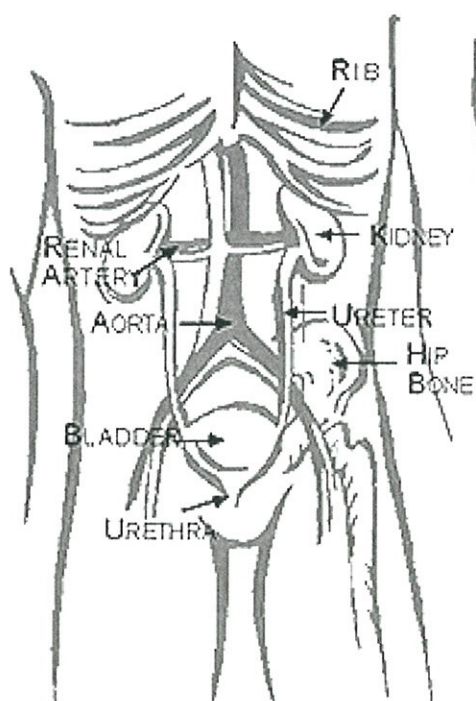


Urinary Tract Infections



(pyelonephritis).

Urinary tract infections are common, particularly with increasing age, though they are also common in infants. They are more likely to occur in women than in men. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 20 men will develop a urine infection in their lifetime.

Urine is normally sterile, that is, it does not contain any germs. Urine infections occur when bacterial organisms (germs) enter the urinary tract. Infection can be limited to the urethra (urethritis), but it may extend to the bladder (cystitis) or even up to the kidneys

Cystitis is the most common urine infection. Cystitis causes the bladder lining to become raw and inflamed. Generally cystitis is a nuisance and not a serious condition.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

The people most affected by urine infections are women in their late teens or older, often after the onset of sexual activity. Babies are also at risk of urine infection. Pregnancy is another time of risk. Men get urine infections later in life. Urine infections are quite

common in elderly people, particularly if they are unwell, in a nursing home or hospital. Bladder catheters and some urinary tract operations may also increase the risk of a person developing urine infections.

WHAT ARE THE SYPTOMS?

Urine infections can cause:

- Pain and burning on passing urine
- The urge to pass urine frequently
- Blood in the urine
- Pain in the back
- Fever (in babies, fever is often the only symptom)

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF URINE INFECTIONS?

Urine infections are caused by bacteria from the bowel. They live on the skin around the urethra and sometimes spread up the urethra to the bladder. The urethra is short in women and sexual intercourse can push bacteria up the urethra since it is situated just in front of the vagina. Urine infections are not contagious and cannot be passed on through sex.

ARE URINE INFECTIONS SERIOUS?

If infection reaches the kidneys it can become serious. The symptoms may then include chills, fever and loin pain in addition to the other symptoms of a urine infection.

A urine infection in a child needs to be investigated, as it may indicate a more serious condition. An ultrasound of the kidney is usually performed.

In children with a urine infection the most common abnormality found is vesico ureteric reflux, a defective bladder valve that allows urine and bacteria to flow back up to the kidneys.

Infections in association with reflux can scar the kidneys and lead to high blood pressure and sometimes kidney failure. Since it occurs in families it is important to screen children as early as possible, if a parent or sibling is known to have reflux.

AVOIDING URINE INFECTIONS

Women can reduce their chance of having a urine infection by:

- Drinking lots of fluid (especially water) to wash bacteria from the bladder and urinary tract
- Wiping from front to back after going to the toilet to help reduce the amount of bacteria near the urethra
- Emptying the bladder after sexual intercourse

Men should see their doctor if they have any trouble with the urine stream and difficulty starting and stopping urine flow as this may indicate an enlargement of the prostate.