

Need to go, go,

Urinary Tract Infections

Sylvia Brown's Top 12 Tips to Help Prevent Them

Urinary tract infections (UTI's), apart from being nasty, can trigger relapses in MS. So it's best to avoid them if you can

Symptoms

- Burning and stinging during urination (cystitis)
- The persistent urge to go, go, go.

Sometimes people with MS don't pick up on these symptoms as they can't feel the burning sensation and frequently need to go anyway. So it's very important to check your urine daily for:

- Cloudiness
- Smelliness
- Or even traces of blood as these are all signs of infection.

Incontinence

Retention of urine is a common problem for people with MS and is thought to be one reason why we are at higher risk of developing UTI's.

Incontinence needs to be handled by a trained Continence Advisor. Request a referral to Urology from your doctor or neurologist. Your Continence Adviser will probably want to scan your bladder to assess whether your bladder is emptying properly.

1 Don't Drink Less - Drink More!

For many of us with MS it is tempting to try resolve the problem of urgency and frequency by drinking less. But this just makes matters far worse by putting us at a greater risk of developing UTIs.

Imagine a river whose flow is interrupted, it is more likely to stagnate. That's why it's crucial that we keep drinking. Passing urine is our natural defence to bacterial multiplication. Health experts recommend that we drink at least 2 litres (8 glasses) of water a day.

2 Drink Cranberry (or Blueberry) Juice

Cranberries have been proven effective in maintaining urinary tract health. They make the urine more acidic, which makes it more difficult for bacteria to multiply. Cranberries also inhibit the E coli bacteria from sticking to the lining the bladder. A large polymeric compound found only in cranberry and blueberry juices is thought to be responsible for this.

Cranberry Juice can be bought in supermarkets but these often contain fructose and added sugar, which promotes poor colon health and is not good for you anyway. It is now possible to get cranberry juice sweetened with apple juice but it is still very pricey.

An alternative is cranberry capsules or tablets (300 - 1000mg daily) The active ingredient is in them and they are easily available.

Fresh cranberries. There is really nothing better than the real thing! No need to wait for Christmas. Stock up your freezers with fresh cranberries in the winter. Then defrost, blend and mix with your favourite fruit juice for a refreshing and healthy drink which also helps keep you infection free.

3 Take Vitamin C to Lower the pH (Acid/Alkaline Balance) of Your Urine

Bacteria can only grow within a certain pH range. When you get an infection the body will try to acidify the urine itself to stop the bacteria multiplying. This is why it burns to pass water. So take 1000 mg of vitamin C a day as this will lower the pH of your urine.

Vitamin C also is also likely to be prescribed for use with a urinary antiseptic drug such as methenamine mandelate (Uroqid-Acid) or methenamine hippurate (Hiprex), as these drugs work best when urine is acidified.*

4 Avoid Cystitis Powders

It is tempting to take over-the-counter cystitis powders as they take the sting out of passing water by neutralising urine.

However, this makes it easier for bacteria to grow.



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5 Be Scrupulous With Personal Hygiene

Another major cause of bladder infections is by bacteria from the bowels migrating up into the bladder through the urethra. This is particularly a problem for women because the female urethra is short.

You can never be vigilant enough in this area. Always wipe from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria from the rectum to the vagina or urethra and regularly wash with running water. Avoid perfumed soaps, feminine hygiene deodorants, deodorant tampons, coloured toilet paper and bubble baths. You can also use baby wipes.

6 Empty Your Bladder Both Before and After Sex

This tip is specifically for women. During sex bacteria can enter the bladder. In some women infection will result if the bacteria are left overnight. Flushing the bacteria out can reduce your risk.

7 Avoid Spermicides

They can upset the balance of bacteria in the vagina, allowing pathogenic bacteria to grow and cause infection. Many condoms have spermicide in their lubricant so it is preferable to use ones without.

8 Maintain Good Vaginal Health

Still on sex, only for women. If there is significant vaginal dryness you are at higher risk of UTI's. Oestrogens reduce the risk of infection by

promoting a friendly environment for the good bacteria to thrive. The most common reason for low oestrogen is the menopause, and many women begin to develop recurrent UTI's around this time. HRT has been shown to be an effective treatment for this problem.

9 Use a Small Prophylactic Dose of Antibiotics



Your doctor or urologist may give you a small dose of antibiotics to take after sex. This can be helpful when other methods fail. It is excreted in the urine and can significantly reduce the risk of infection.

Personally, I choose to use natural alternatives such as cranberry, aloe vera juice, and citricidal (grapefruit seed

extract), a natural antiparasitic, and garlic, (raw or odourless capsules) nature's antibiotic.

I have learnt the hard way that the FREQUENT USE OF ANTIBIOTICS IS BEST AVOIDED.

They create Candida (yeast overgrowth), weaken your body's defence against further infection, and throw your body out of balance so increasing the risk of MS relapse.

Antibiotics may not always solve the problem of recurrent UTI's. According to research from the University of North Carolina, bacteria may be able to survive antibiotic treatment for bladder infections by reverting to a dormant state. Bladder infections caused by E coli have been shown to recur in as many as 30% of women treated with antibiotics.

However:

10 Take Acidophilus

After a course of antibiotics, it's a good idea to take probiotics like acidophilus.

Antibiotics not only kill the bacteria which are causing the infection but also kill off the good bacteria, which protect the body from further infections. It is therefore advisable to replenish the gut flora to redress this balance.

11 Boost Your Immune System

The best way to do this is to eat a healthy diet with lots of fruit and vegetables, exercise regularly, take nutritional supplements, where possible avoid stress and get enough restful sleep.

12 Avoid Constipation

When you are constipated the number of bacteria deposited around the area between the anus and vagina increases. So increase your fibre intake. Try eating a spoonful of sesame seeds with every meal alongside plenty of trusty fruit and vegetables. There are also many herbal laxatives and over the counter products like Epsom Salts or Fybogel.



* Ask your G.P. or continence nurse about this drug. It can be prescribed as long-term therapy to prevent recurrent or antibiotic-resistant infections.