

What it means when peeing hurts

A common problem among women, recurrent urinary tract infection has a higher risk of more serious infection, says urologist Dr Ong Chin Hu

Urinary tract infection (UTI) commonly refers to bacterial infection of the urinary bladder. This is known as cystitis.

Women are more likely to be affected by UTI than men, and nearly half of all women in Singapore would have at least one episode of UTI in their lifetime, says consultant urologist Dr Ong Chin Hu from ACE Urology Clinic & Surgery. Here, he addresses some common questions about the condition.

Q It hurts when I pass urine. How can I tell if this is a symptom of UTI?

Patients who have UTI can experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- burning pain when passing urine
- dull pain at the lower abdomen or pelvis
- frequent and urgent need to pass urine.

Q Who is at higher risk of getting recurrent UTI?

Recurrent UTI is defined as having two or more UTIs in a six-month period.

Some females are more susceptible to it due to low intake of fluids and prolonged holding of urine, which decreases the effective regular flushing and cleansing of the bladder.

Menopausal women have lower oestrogen levels and vaginal dryness, which increases the levels of bacteria at the urinary tract opening.

Those who have urinary stones, urinary tract obstruction and congenital urinary tract malformations may also have recurrent UTI.

Q What are some common misconceptions about UTI?

People often think poor vaginal hygiene is the cause of UTI. Whilst vaginal hygiene is important, it may not be the sole cause.



A burning sensation when urinating, frequent urge to go and a dull pain in the lower abdomen or pelvis are all signs your urinary tract may be infected. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

The most common cause of UTI is the bacteria *Escherichia coli*, commonly known as *E. coli*.

E. coli present in our gut is harmless and aids digestion. It is also present at our urinary tract opening and can move up the bladder, reproduce and grow, resulting in a UTI episode.

Another common misconception is that UTI is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Although sexual activity can sometimes trigger UTI, it is not an STD as the bacteria that causes UTI comes from the patient herself. Sexual activity pushes the resident bacteria at the urinary tract opening into the bladder and may trigger a UTI. Thus, it is advisable to drink water and pass urine after sexual activity to flush out the bacteria.

Q What happens if I have frequent UTI and how do I reduce its occurrence?

Frequent UTI puts one at higher risk of more serious infections as the bacterial infection can ascend up the kidneys. Once the infection reaches the kidneys, patients can be seriously ill and require hospital care and intravenous antibiotics.

Recurrent infection of the kidneys is also known to cause scarring of the kidneys and chronic kidney disease.

Get UTI treated as early as possible. Those with frequent UTIs should be assessed by a urologist who can investigate and advise the appropriate steps to mitigate further infections.



Dr Ong Chin Hu

Consultant urologist
 ACE Urology Clinic & Surgery
 Mount Alvernia Hospital
 Medical Centre D #07-56