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Cystitis and Recurrent Urinary Tract Infections

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Key facts

- About half of women will have at least one urinary tract infection in their lifetime.
- Mild cystitis often settles within a few days, but some infections need antibiotics.
- Fever, back or side pain, or blood in the urine need prompt medical attention.
- Recurrent UTIs means two or more in six months, or three or more in a year.
- Cranberry products have the best evidence among natural options for preventing repeat infections.

What is cystitis?

Cystitis means inflammation of the bladder, most often caused by a bacterial urinary tract infection (UTI). It is very common in women because the urethra is short and close to the back passage, so bacteria can reach the bladder easily.

What are the symptoms?

- Burning or stinging when passing urine
- Needing to pass urine more often or urgently, including at night
- Cloudy, dark or strong-smelling urine
- Pain low in the tummy

When to get medical help urgently

Contact your GP, NHS 111 or a pharmacist the same day if you have a high temperature, shivering, pain in your back or side, blood in your urine, are pregnant, or if symptoms do not improve within a few days. These can be signs of a kidney infection, which needs antibiotics promptly.

What are the conventional treatment options?

Mild cystitis may clear on its own within a few days. A pharmacist can assess symptoms and, in England, can prescribe antibiotics for uncomplicated UTIs in women aged 16 to 64. A urine sample sent to the laboratory identifies the bacteria and which antibiotic will work, which is important as antibiotic resistance is increasing. For recurrent UTIs, options include preventive antibiotics or a single antibiotic dose after sex.

How do we help with recurrent cystitis at the Women’s Natural Health Clinic?

Your treatment plan may include:

- **Cranberry products**: a 2023 Cochrane review found they reduce the risk of repeat UTIs in women with recurrent infections.
- **Chinese herbal medicine**, prescribed according to your pattern, often addressing damp-heat in the bladder in Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- **Investigation** of contributing factors, including hormonal changes, constipation and incomplete bladder emptying, which ultrasound can assess.
- **D-mannose**, a popular supplement for non-bacterial recurrent cystitis.

- **Practical prevention advice** tailored to you.

Self-help for cystitis

- Drink plenty of water so you pass pale urine regularly
- Go to the toilet when you need to rather than holding on, and empty your bladder fully
- Empty your bladder before and after intercourse
- Wipe from front to back
- Avoid perfumed soaps, bubble baths and vaginal deodorants
- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight trousers
- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can ease pain; pharmacy products that reduce urine acidity may ease stinging but should be checked with a pharmacist if you take other medicines

Frequently asked questions

Does cranberry juice cure cystitis?

Cranberry products help prevent repeat infections, but they do not treat an active infection. Choose unsweetened juice or capsules, and avoid cranberry if you take warfarin.

Do I always need antibiotics for cystitis?

Not always. Mild cystitis often settles within a few days.

Why do I keep getting UTIs?

Recurrent UTIs can be linked to sex, menopause, constipation, incomplete bladder emptying or diabetes. Identifying the trigger helps choose the right prevention.

Book a consultation

To book, visit womensnaturalhealthclinic.com/book or call 020 3811 8778. Initial consultations last up to one hour at our clinic at 16 Bridle Lane, St Margaret’s, Twickenham TW1 3EE.

Sources

- NHS: Cystitis (nhs.uk/conditions/cystitis)
- NICE NG112: Urinary tract infection (recurrent) (nice.org.uk/guidance/ng112)