Beating bladder infections

Women seem to suffer painful urination more frequently than men.

Mark Stengler, ND

The uncomfortable and irritating symptoms of a bladder infection (cystitis) send tens of thousands of Canadian women to their doctors every year. Most are treated with antibiotics, a strategy that kills the infection but leaves the bladder vulnerable to bacterial invasion. As a result, 10 to 20 per cent of women return to their doctor with a new bladder infection within 12 months.

Although bacteria are the cause of most infections, several other conditions put women at risk of bladder infection. Frequent use of antibiotics is the most prevalent, since these medications destroy the “good” bacteria needed to fight infections. Anything else that weakens the immune system, such as stress or a poor diet, also increases the likelihood of infection. Pregnancy, sexual intercourse, and injury to the area are also associated with a higher risk. Hormone imbalances can also contribute to an increased susceptibility. Menopause is also a contributor, as many women start to experience bladder infections for the first time due to hormonal changes.

Most bladder infections respond well to home care that treats the symptoms while strengthening the immune system. Follow these suggestions for treatment. As you progress, your doctor should monitor your infection to ensure it isn’t travelling upward into the kidneys.

Many women experience bladder infections for the first time during the hormonal changes of menopause.

One of the best strategies for fighting and preventing a bladder infection is to increase urine output. Drink as much clean water as possible. Try for one six- to eight-ounce glass every waking hour.

Cranberry juice has long been a folk remedy for bladder infections, and now science has helped us understand why: it appears that cranberry juice keeps bacteria from clinging to the linings of the bladder and urethra. Drink several glasses a day.

Natural diuretics that help flush out infection include watermelon, celery, or parsley, fresh or as juices. If you must take antibiotics, eat one cup (250 ml) unsweetened live yogurt or other cultured product every day. These foods help return “good” bacteria to your body.

Symptoms

- Frequency: urination may exceed 60 times in a 24-hour period
- Pain: chronic discomfort during urination and sex
- Urgency: sensation of having to urinate immediately, often accompanied by bladder pain, pressure, or spasm.
## Treating the Infection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remedy</th>
<th>Dosage</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uva ursi</td>
<td>250 mg or five ml of tincture, four times daily</td>
<td>Converts in the body to a chemical called hydroquinone, which destroys bacteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echinacea and goldenseal</td>
<td>500 mg in capsule form or four ml of tincture, four times daily</td>
<td>Enhance immune function to combat infection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberry extract</td>
<td>400 to 500 mg cranberry extract capsules, twice daily</td>
<td>Prevents bacteria from adhering to the bladder wall. Best used for prevention of urinary tract infections but can be used as part of a comprehensive protocol for acute infection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsetail</td>
<td>500 mg of the capsule or two ml of tincture, four times daily</td>
<td>Has a long history of use for urinary tract infections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantharis</td>
<td>30C potency, four daily for acute infection</td>
<td>The homeopathic remedy of choice for bladder infections. Use it if you have small tinges of blood in your urine, a strong urge but produce very little urine, or burning and cutting pains upon urination as well as cramps in abdomen and lower back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
<td>1,000 mg, four to five times daily</td>
<td>Enhances immune function, inhibits the growth of E. coli, and makes the urine more acidic so bacteria cannot grow as easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probiotic</td>
<td>Four billion organisms (minimum) daily</td>
<td>Contains friendly bacteria that prevent the overgrowth of harmful bacteria. Especially important to take when using antibiotics. Take at a separate time during the day and continue use for two months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid refined sugar products as they depress the immune system and encourage the growth of bacteria. During the course of the infection, stay away from salty, spicy, processed, or refined foods, as well as caffeine. All of these substances further irritate the bladder.

Last but not least, food allergies can cause recurring bladder infections. Common allergies include cow's milk, citrus fruit, and wheat. If you have a chronic problem, then the elimination or reduction of food allergies may be important. 

Mark Stengler, ND, is a practicing naturopathic doctor and author of several books, including The Natural Physician's Healing Therapies (Prentice Hall-Avery, 2002) and Your Menopause, Your Menotype (Penguin, 2003). Visit: thematuralphysician.com.