Lose the Bladder Blues

Natural treatment and prevention for bladder infections

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It is a very fortunate woman who has never experienced the anguish of a bladder infection. Up to 20 per cent of all women in Canada suffer from this condition at least once a year. Nearly 40 per cent of women who have never had a bladder infection will get one within the next decade.

Bladder infections are indeed very common. Also called cystitis or urinary tract infection (UTI), this painful condition is most often associated with E. coli bacteria migrating from the colon. Other less common invading bacteria are Citrobacter, Klebsiella, Pseudomonas, Proteus, Enterococcus and Staphylococcus.

Factors for Infection
Pregnancy, due to hormonal changes favouring bacterial growth, doubles a women's risk, and sexual activity increases the chances tenfold. Bacteria tend to thrive in a body that contains a lot of sugar. Diabetics and those with high sugar intakes are thus more likely to get bladder and other infections. Stress and the overuse of antibiotics are two more factors that lead to higher rates of bladder infections. Structural abnormalities in the urinary tract that block the free flow of urine or cause urinary reflux also dramatically boost the infection rate.

Thanks to anatomical differences between men and women (women have a much shorter urethra that is more prone to bacterial invasion), men rarely get bladder infections. In men, they occur only as secondary infections to structural abnormalities, neurological diseases such as multiple sclerosis, prostate infections, immune system weaknesses or as a consequence of rectal intercourse.

Symptoms and Diagnosis
Symptoms often include burning pain on urination, urgency to urinate, urinary frequency, foul-smelling, turbid or dark urine, low abdominal pain and, in some cases, fever. A visit to the average family doctor, emergency room or walk-in clinic usually ends with a urine culture test and a prescription for a seven- to 14-day course of antibiotics. While this mainstream approach is most often satisfactory, it is not necessarily the safest, most cost-effective or disease-preventive approach to the problem. At least 50 per cent of all women who suffer from recurrent bladder infections will develop kidney damage, sometimes leading to kidney failure.

What to Do
First and most importantly, especially for preventing bladder infection, maintain proper hygiene. Wipe from front to back after every use of the toilet to prevent urethral contact with colonic bacteria. If at all possible, shower before and urinate after sex. Urinate when you get the urge instead of holding it, to prevent bacteria from taking a foothold. Avoid any sort of vaginal deodorants because these change the flora and increase susceptibility to infection.

Drink more fluids to increase the bacterial flushing effects of the urine flow. It's best to use pure spring water (at least half of all your fluid intake), herbal teas and diluted fruit and vegetable juices. For
most adults, this means drinking at least two litres of fluids daily. Avoid anything containing caffeine (especially soft drinks and coffee) or alcohol because of their irritating and dehydrating effects on the bladder.

Since bacteria thrive on sugar, avoid all simple sugars (such as in pop and most packaged cereals), refined carbohydrates (white bread and other refined flour products) and full-strength fruit juices. Eating more garlic and onions is a good idea because these vegetables have a strong antibacterial effect.

Next, see if you can add unsweetened cranberry juice, at least half a litre daily divided into four doses. Hippuric acid and other ingredients of cranberry juice prevent bacteria such as E. coli from adhering to the bladder and urethral endothelium (inner lining). Freshly squeezed blueberry juice is an effective alternative to cranberry juice.

Most bladder infections will respond very nicely to these simple measures. Stubborn or recurrent cases may require the use of a combination of nutritional, herbal or homeopathic supplements.

**Nutritional Supplements**

Take the following supplements until you are clear of symptoms for at least one week:

- Vitamin C with bioflavonoids - 500 to 1,000 milligrams every two hours, depending on how much the bowels can tolerate it without diarrhea
- Vitamin A - 10,000 to 25,000 IU daily
- Mixed carotenoids (from a green drink containing chlorella, spirulina and blue-green algae) - 100,000 IU daily
- Vitamin E - 400 IU daily
- Zinc citrate - 30 mg daily
- Probiotics (broad-spectrum friendly flora) - three capsules or one teaspoon daily
- D-mannose - 1,000 to 2,000 mg three times daily. This is a natural plant-derived sugar that prevents bacteria from sticking to the cells lining the urinary bladder, much like how Teflon works on your frying pan.

**Herbal Remedies**

Take these herbs until symptoms are cleared for at least one week:

- Oil of oregano - three or four drops under the tongue, four times daily
- Uva ursi tincture - one-half teaspoon, three times daily
- Goldenseal tincture - one-half teaspoon, three times daily
- Horsetail tea - one cup, three times daily
- Teas made with one or more of the following herbs: bearberry leaves, lemon balm, birch leaves, stinging nettle leaves and roots, dandelion leaves and roots, parsley, yarrow and rosehips. Flavour to taste with licorice root tincture or stevia and take the tea until symptoms are gone.

**Homeopathic Remedies**

- *Cantharis* 6C - take two tablets under the tongue every hour until symptoms improve, then four times daily until symptoms clear.
- *Apis* 6C - two tablets, four times daily. Use only if symptoms are sharp or stinging.
- *Belladonna*, *Dulcamara* and *Pulsatilla* in the 6C dose are other effective bladder infection remedies.
- Tissue salts: *Ferr phos* - four tablets under the tongue every 30 minutes until symptoms improve, then three times daily until completely better.
- Other useful tissue salts: *Kali mur*, *Mag phos*, *Kali phos*, *Silicea* and *Nat mur*.

These natural approaches can deal satisfactorily with well over 90 per cent of bladder infections. For those who fail to respond or who are plagued with persistent discomfort, seek the help of a natural health-care provider for more individualized treatment.

Dr. Zoltan Rona has practiced preventive medicine in Toronto for more than 20 years. His published books include *The Joy of Health and Return to the Joy of Health* available through your health food store or *alive* Books at 1-800-663-6513.

**What About Interstitial Cystitis?**

Take note, there is also a condition called interstitial cystitis. Here, the symptoms may well be identical to those of a typical bladder infection. The difference is that with interstitial cystitis no bacteria are involved. The condition is due to an inflammation of the internal lining of the bladder, which, in turn, is thought to be caused by food allergies or some other damaging factor such as candida or other type of fungus.

For those with interstitial cystitis, cranberry or blueberry juices could be irritating, making symptoms worse. For this type of bladder problem, making the urine pH more alkaline (higher pH), is the answer. This can be done by going on a more alkaline ash diet (see Dr. Rona's book, *Return to The Joy of Health*, *alive* Books, 1985) and/or by supplementing citrate salts (sodium and potassium citrate) or bicarbonate.

For more information, contact the Canadian Interstitial Cystitis Society at 250-758-3207 or the Interstitial Cystitis Association in New York at 212-979-6057 or visit ichelp.org.