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Cystitis - A Burning Issue

If you've had cystitis before, you will remember the intense discomfort and pain it can cause. It is a very common problem that tends to affect women more than men. Cystitis is inflammation and often irritation of the bladder and is caused when bacteria travel along the urethra (the small tube leading up to your bladder). These bacteria are always present in our intestines and normally are found around the openings of the rectum, vagina and urethra. Usually the bladder's own 'self defence' mechanisms enable the body to cope with these bacteria but in some circumstance, an infection can result.

Signs of cystitis are burning or stinging when passing urine, needing to pass urine often, passing only small amounts of urine at a time or producing discoloured, cloudy and smelly urine.

Help is available to treat cystitis – urinary alkalinisers such as Ural^R help to make the urine less acid and less likely for the bacteria to thrive. They help relieve the burning when you pass urine. Cranberries (and blueberries) are thought to prevent bacteria from adhering to the bladder lining, which may assist with treating or preventing infections. Crancleanse^R is quite a new product that combines an alkaliniser with cranberry in an effervescent tablet. A hot water bottle on your stomach may help to ease any pain you feel. If your symptoms don't go away within 24 hours, you may need to see your doctor who may prescribe antibiotics.

Some symptoms may mean the infection is more serious. It is important to see your doctor immediately if you experience high fever, confusion, pain in your lower back or lower stomach, an unusual vaginal discharge or blood in your urine. Children and men can get cystitis too and both should have their symptoms checked out by their doctors without delay.

Women can take some simple steps to prevent cystitis, and help decrease the number of attacks. Drink lots of fluids, especially water, as this will help to flush bacteria out of your bladder. Wear cotton underwear, or underwear with cotton gussets, as these allow the skin to breathe. Empty your bladder completely each time you pass urine, and immediately after sexual intercourse, to help get rid of remaining bacteria. Avoid using diaphragms or tampons when you have cystitis as these can increase the number of bacteria and make the infection worse. Using toilet paper, wipe from front to back after urinating. Perfumed soaps and vaginal deodorants can irritate the skin so avoid them too.