Cystitis

**Follow-up**
If you are prone to cystitis you may find that you can avoid further episodes if you:

- drink at least 1.5 litres (3 pints) of liquid a day
- pass water whenever you feel the need – don’t hang on until the last minute
- make sure you empty your bladder completely when you pass water
- always wipe your bottom from front to back to avoid spreading bacteria from the anus
- avoid using perfumed soaps, deodorants, antiseptics or talc in the genital area

If you get cystitis after sex it may help to:

- wash and pass water before and after sex (ask your partner to do the same)
- use a lubricant when you have penetrative sex

Remember, after treatment, using condoms during sex can reduce your risk of getting or passing on sexually transmitted infections.

This factsheet is one of a series which give information on the following range of infections and diseases:
- bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, cystitis, genital herpes, genital warts, gonorrhoea, hepatitis (A, B and C), non-specific urethritis, penile cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), prostate cancer, pubic lice, scabies, syphilis, testicular cancer, thrush and trichomonas vaginalis.

A leaflet on cystitis is also available.

Free copies of any of these factsheets are available from GP surgeries, NHS sexual health (GUM) clinics, or your local health promotion unit (in the phone book under your local Health Authority).

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Cystitis is an inflammation inside the bladder. More than half the women in the UK will have it at some time. Many women suffer repeated episodes. Men can get cystitis too, but it is much less common.

Cystitis can be very painful and distressing but it is not usually a danger to your health.

**Signs and symptoms**
When you have cystitis you will experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- a burning feeling in the urethra when you pass water – sometimes there can be blood in the urine or it may be cloudy
- a feeling that you need to pass water very frequently, even though there may be hardly any urine to pass
- a dragging ache in the lower back or abdomen
Cystitis

How cystitis develops
Cystitis can be caused by:

- bacteria – the bacteria which normally live in your bowel can cause inflammation if they get into the urethra or bladder
- friction – sometimes the urethra can be bruised during sex
- ‘irritable bladder’ – a particularly sensitive bladder

Taking care of yourself
There are several things you can do to relieve the symptoms.

- Drink a pint of liquid as soon as you recognise the symptoms. Then, every 20 minutes, drink at least another half-pint of fluid. After 3 hours you will probably find the symptoms begin to wear off. Lots of water (or any other bland liquid) helps to flush out bacteria and to dilute your urine so that it does not sting as much when you pass water.
- Place a hot-water bottle wrapped in a towel between your thighs or on your lower back to help ease the pain.
- Take a teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda mixed with half a pint of water, or other weak liquid, every hour. This makes your urine less acidic and so stops the bacteria multiplying. It also eases the stinging when you pass water. (Anyone with high blood pressure or heart trouble should not take bicarbonate of soda.)
- Take a couple of pain-killers.
- Rest and relax. Ask your doctor about alternative or complementary treatments like aromatherapy. Some women find that regular drinking of cranberry juice, or barley water, can help clear up an attack.

Where to go for help
- Your pharmacist, who can sell you a treatment to relieve the symptoms of cystitis.
- Your own GP.
- Your local NHS sexual health (GUM) clinic. You can find details of your nearest NHS sexual health clinic in the phone book under genito-urinary medicine (GUM), sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or venereal diseases (VD). Or phone your local hospital and ask for the ‘special’ or GUM clinic. Or check our website (www.playingsafely.co.uk) for a directory of GUM clinics in the UK. You will get free, confidential advice and treatment. You can go to any clinic anywhere in the country – you don’t have to go to a local one – and you don’t have to be referred by your GP. (Non-NHS sexual health clinics may not always offer the full range of services which are available at NHS sexual health clinics.)

When to see the doctor

Women
You should always see your GP or a doctor at an NHS sexual health clinic if:

- an attack of cystitis continues for more than a day or two or you have repeated episodes
- you are pregnant (because pregnant women are particularly prone to kidney infections, this will have to be ruled out by your doctor)
- you notice blood in your urine
- you have other symptoms, such as vaginal discharge
- you think your cystitis symptoms could be caused by a sexually transmitted infection

Men
You should always see a doctor if you get cystitis.

Tests, diagnosis and treatment
Your doctor will ask you for a sample of urine to find out whether you have an infection. If so, you will be given a course of antibiotics or other drugs.

The doctor will also be able to confirm that you are not suffering from a more serious infection.

If you are allergic to any antibiotics, or if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, it is important that you tell your doctor.

It is important that you finish any course of treatment. If treatment is interrupted, it may be necessary to start again from the beginning.

You should get individual advice about having sex during treatment from your doctor, nurse or health adviser.

(continued overleaf)