

Stamp Out the Enemy: Urinary Tract Infection

Objectives: At the end of this training the learner will be able to:

- identify three common symptoms seen in an individual with a UTI
- State three risk factors for UTI
- State three preventative measures for UTI

Recognizing the signs of a urinary tract infection early is half the battle.

If a thirty year old woman experiencing painful burning when urinating she almost certainly has a urinary tract infection (UTI). However, an elderly individual who is experiencing a urinary tract infection may not exhibit the usual symptoms.

Common Warning Signs

A sudden change in behavior may be the best indicator of a urinary tract infection in the older adult. Sudden onset of incontinence, confusion, or the inability to do tasks previously easily accomplished can be early indicators of the presence of a UTI.

Symptoms of a UTI include general discomfort, a feeling of being over-tired, blood in the urine and pain in the abdominal area or upon urination.

An **elderly** person will rarely have a fever, but if a fever develops this is considered an urgent event and should not be taken lightly.

Diagnosis and Treatment

A urinalysis to indicate the presence of infection is indicated. Antibiotics are the first choice of treatment. UTI's often clear in a few days. It is recommended that adults drink six 8 – oz glasses of fluid daily (unless contraindicated by other health issues, i.e. heart failure) to flush the bacteria from the urinary system. Drinking cranberry juice or taking cranberry tablets can make the urine less inviting for the bacteria. It is recommended that once symptoms occur, the primary health care provider should be contacted by the supervising nurse so medical treatment can be started as soon as possible.

Risk Factors

Older adults are at greater risk for UTI, especially women due to the proximity of the urethra to the anus.

Incontinence, the presence of a urinary catheter, or diabetes increases the chance of UTI.

Prevention

Preventive measures would include:

- Urinating promptly once the urge arises
- Women should always wipe after toileting from front to back
- Women emptying the bladder shortly before and especially after intercourse
- Women avoiding the use of deodorant sprays, douches, and powders in the genital area that could irritate the urethra, unless specifically ordered by physician
- Take showers instead of baths
- Caregivers providing strict perineal care for incontinent individuals
- Reporting any signs and symptoms of UTI to the patient's family so the health care provider can be contacted promptly.