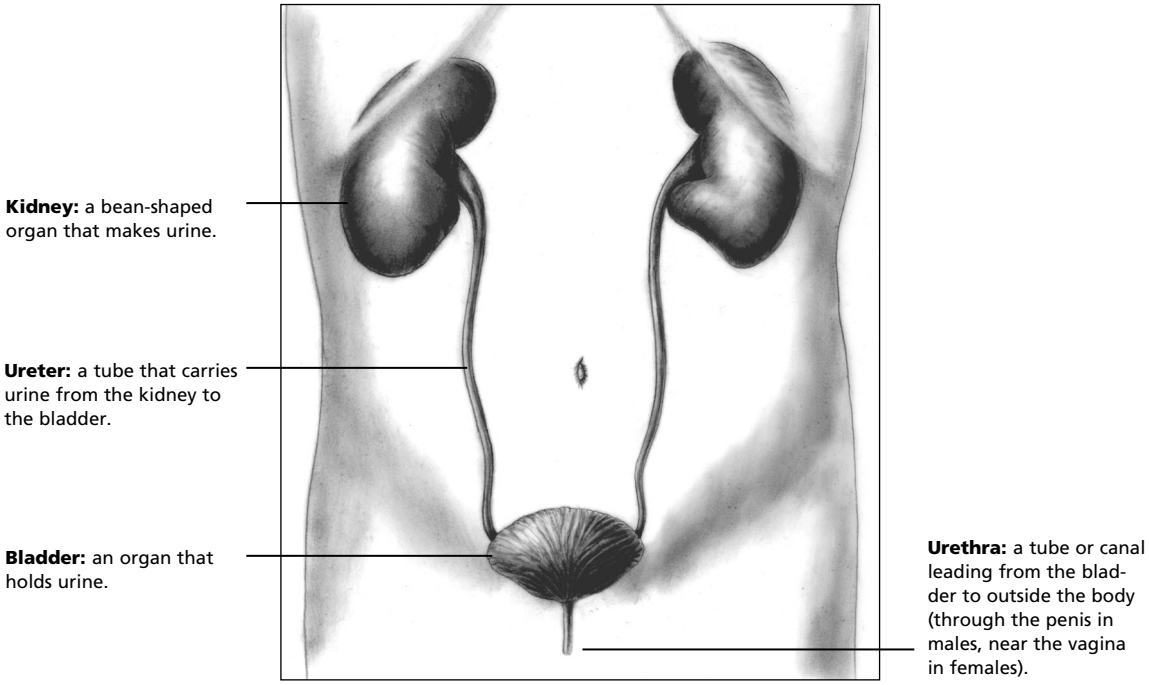
Let's Talk About...

Urinary tract infection



Urinary System

A urinary tract infection, also called a **UTI**, is one of the most common infections in children. It affects the kidneys, ureter, bladder, and urethra (see picture of urinary system). Most often, the bladder and kidneys are affected. If the bladder is infected, it is called **cystitis** (sis-TITE-us). An infection of the kidneys is called **pyelonephritis** (PIE-low-neh-FRITE-us).

A UTI is usually caused by bacteria (germs) entering the urinary tract through the urethra. The infection may cause pain when your child urinates (pees). Bubble bath, shampoo, or not changing diapers frequently enough may also cause pain with urination, and occasionally help cause UTIs. The chemicals in the bubbles and shampoo irritate the urethra when your child sits in this water. Occasionally a child is born with a blockage or back-up in the urinary system. this may cause an infection to develop more easily.

Urinary tract infections most often happen with children between the ages of 2 to 6. Girls are more likely to have UTIs than boys. A baby younger than 4-months-old may need to go to the hospital for a UTI. After a UTI is diagnosed, the child may need x-ray tests.

What happens with a urinary tract infection?

Symptoms are different according to your child's age:

Babies:

- Poor appetite
- Vomiting
- Sleepiness, inactivity, and increased fussiness
- Fever greater than over 101°F (38°C)
- Diarrhea

Older children:

(the symptoms may be more localized)

- Pain or burning when urinating
- Bloody urine
- Going to the bathroom often, but with small amounts of urine
- Strong-smelling or dark colored urine
- A feeling of having to urinate all the time
- Belly or back pain
- Fever

Your child may start wetting the bed at night or wetting her pants during the day even if she is toilet trained. Half of all children with a UTI have no symptoms or only mild symptoms.

To find out if your child has a urinary tract infection, you must collect a clean-catch urine sample. Your nurse will tell you how to get this. You can also see the handouts, ***Let's Talk About… Clean catch urine samples for boys***, and ***Let's Talk About… Clean catch urine samples for girls***. If a clean catch is not available from home, your child's nurse may use a catheter to obtain the urine sample.

The laboratory will look for pus and bacteria in urine. Then the laboratory will try to grow germs from the urine and find out which antibiotic will kill the germs. Once the type of bacteria is found, the proper antibiotic can be given.

How do I help my child prevent a urinary tract infection?

- Teach your child to keep herself clean. Girls should be taught to wipe from front to back, especially after having a bowel movement (poop).
- Try to stay away from harsh liquids that may irritate your child's urethra and provide a place for bacteria to grow.
- Have your child urinate after baths.
- Sexually active females should urinate after sexual intercourse.
- Some children will have UTIs again and again and may need to take a daily antibiotic to prevent more infections.

How will the doctor treat a urinary tract infection?

If your child does have a UTI, her doctor will write a prescription for an antibiotic. It is very important to give the medicine the way her doctor tells you and have her take the medicine until it is all gone. While taking the antibiotic, encourage your child to drink fluids and follow the doctor's instructions. If symptoms continue, call your child's doctor for further instructions.

Your doctor may hospitalize your child to have her receive antibiotics into a vein instead of pills. Her doctor will let you know if this is necessary.

Call your doctor if…

- Your child's urine becomes bloody
- Your child starts acting very sick
- Your child can only pass very small amounts of urine
- Your child still has fever or painful urination is 48 hours after starting antibiotics
- Your child gets worse while taking the medicine
- Your child develops a rash after starting the medicine

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