Nongonococcal urethritis (NGU) [1]

Dear Alice,

What is NGU (nongonococcal urethritis) and how can it be treated at home?

**Answer**

Dear Reader,

Urethritis can be caused by many pathogens, but nongonococcal urethritis (NGU) simply means that the infection or irritation of the urethra is caused by something other than gonorrhea (gonococcal referring to gonorrhea). The urethra is the spaghetti-shaped tube that carries urine from your bladder to the outside of your body. Most often, NGU is caused by chlamydia in about 15 to 40 percent of cases. NGU can also be caused by other bacteria (like mycoplasma genitalium, which accounts for about 15 to 25 percent of all cases), viruses, or by certain procedures such as catheterization. And while the idea of at-home remedies presents an attractive option, NGU can only be diagnosed by a health care provider using lab tests, and treatment usually involves prescription antibiotics.

Symptoms of urethritis include discharge from the penis or vagina and burning or pain during urination. Due to anatomical differences, men are more likely to be diagnosed with NGU and may experience itching, irritation, or tenderness. When NGU occurs in women, they may experience abdominal pain or atypical vaginal bleeding. It's good to note, however, that many of those infected are asymptomatic, meaning they have no tell-tale symptoms.

So what do you do if you have NGU? To confirm whether or not you have NGU and to get the proper treatment, seeing a health care provider is your best bet. If you test positive, antibiotic regimens that are between one and seven doses are typically prescribed. Your health care provider will also likely recommend that your sexual partner(s) be screened for chlamydia because most NGU results from sexual contact with an infected partner.

Getting a prompt diagnosis and treatment is also essential, because having NGU (or any type of urethritis) can make it easier for you to get HIV if you've been exposed to the virus. Also, if left untreated, NGU can lead to infertility and severe infections in the reproductive systems (e.g. pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women and epididymitis in men). It may also result in systemic problems like arthritis (in men).

Though your best bet is to seek medical attention if you suspect you might have NGU, one at-home (or anywhere really) prevention strategy that can be helpful is using those lovely latex
barriers during sex. It’s the surest way to reduce the risk of nongonococcal urethritis and keep you peeing in peace.

Alice!
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