Do I have a UTI? How do I know? [1]

Dear Alice,

For the second time this year, I have had a bout of what I think might be a u-tract infection, but I'm not sure if that's what it is. For about a week now I have had the urgency to urinate hundreds of times throughout the day, and could easily urinate every five minutes without problem. The bothersome thing is that, although I'm not incontinent, it is dripping a little and is therefore very unpleasant and awkward. I'm not experiencing any burning sensation, and I know that I'm not pregnant. Any advice? (I started drinking cranberry juice yesterday, thinking that might help I'm not exactly sure why).

Thanks,
Slightly embarrassed.

Answer

Dear Slightly embarrassed,

The urge to pee multiple times per day sounds like it must be irritating! Anytime something strange is going on with our body, it can be troubling, so there is no need to be embarrassed. What you describe could be a number of things, but most likely it is an infection. It's probably a good idea to see a health care professional for treatment, especially if it continues.

You mention the possibility of a u-tract infection (a.k.a. urinary tract infection or UTI [2]) which is a common infection that both women and men may contract. UTIs are usually caused by bacteria and are treated with antibiotics. The symptoms may vary based on the individual, but common symptoms include:

- Feeling like you have to urinate all of the time.
- Pain and/or burning when you do urinate.
- Blood in your urine.

Other infections can also cause symptoms that may mimic a UTI including:

- Chlamydia [3], a bacterial infection of the genital tract, may cause painful urination and/or lower abdominal pain.
- Similarly, gonorrhea [4] may cause painful urination, but may also cause frequent urination and some discharge.
Both chlamydia and gonorrhea can be treated with antibiotics and symptoms should improve quickly.

Home remedies, such as cranberry juice, packets, and pills, have a reputation as being helpful in preventing UTIs. Some studies suggest that they are effective in preventing UTIs, but the necessary dosage and method (juice vs. pills, for example) is not known. As for treating UTIs, while cranberry juice and extracts show anecdotal promise as an effective treatment, no rigorous studies have shown that cranberry products can cure a UTI.

Even if you are not in pain and it's just an inconvenience at this point, you should consider seeking medical care. Because your symptoms could be a sign of an infection it is important that you get a culture test soon. Untreated infections can worsen and may lead to serious illness. Your provider should be able to help you figure out ways to prevent these problems in the future.

Although it may be embarrassing now, getting help is an important step to better health. Just think, won't it be nice to not always be on the lookout for the nearest bathroom?!

Alice!

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