

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

By Sandi Cooper

Infections of the urinary system are quite common, although cystitis (infection of the bladder) is the most frequent offender. Cystitis is basically a bacterial infection of the bladder, occurring more frequently in females. This is due to the fact that the urethra (passage which urine passes through) is shorter in females than in males meaning bacteria can easily travel up and cause an infection.

In acute cases common symptoms include increased frequency or urination, urgency of urination, a possible burning sensation, as well as pain on passing urine. Chronic cases will often have milder symptoms. Cystitis needs to be addressed quickly as it can very easily spread and cause more severe kidney troubles. A quick shot gun approach is needed here to control and eradicate the infection, and afterwards preventative measures need to be employed and we need to work out the causes or triggers of the infection.

As cystitis is primarily a bacterial infection, we need to use antimicrobial agents to get the infection under control. Herbs such as Echinacea, Pau Darco, wormwood and garlic are very useful and there are numerous potent formulas we can employ that combine a number of these powerful herbs. Supporting your immune system is also vital as this helps in controlling the infection as well as preventing reoccurrences. Andrographis, echinacea, zinc, arabinogalactans and immune stimulating mushrooms are some of the natural immune-enhancing options we have at our fingertips. Higher doses of Vitamin C help as well; it supports your immunity at the same time as providing a local antibacterial effect.

Herbs with specific actions on the urinary system also form a large part of your treatment. Powerful herbs such as bearberry, couchgrass, buchu, and meadowsweet help to remove fluid wastes, tone and strengthen the urinary system, soothe the area through their anti-inflammatory actions and some have local antibacterial actions as well.

One area not to be forgotten is your digestive system. Any imbalance between the good and bad bacteria in your intestines is often reflected by an imbalance in vaginal bacteria as well. An overgrowth of unfriendly bacteria in a woman's vagina can lead to an increased incidence of cystitis as the bacteria can easily travel up the urethra and cause infections. In some cases following a low-yeast, low sugar diet, high in fibre with extra supplemented beneficial bacteria may be needed. In more severe cases a full Integrated Detoxification program may be needed.

In remembering that our body is interconnected with our mind and emotions, it is important to acknowledge any imbalance in our thoughts or emotions that may be playing a role in recurrent urinary tract infections. According to Dr Christine Northrup there are some specific stressors that affect the bladder and urinary system. These are often related to unacknowledged anger or blaming towards someone, usually towards the opposite sex. Anxiety, holding on to old ideas and fear of letting go has also been attributed to cystitis and fear has traditionally been associated with the kidneys. A little food for thought for those suffering from recurrent urinary tract infections- is there anyone you are "pissy" at or is there unspoken resentment and issues that may need to

be address. Repeating this affirmation from Louise hay may help focus your awareness: 'I release the pattern in myself that created this condition. I am willing to change. I love and approve of myself.'

Things you can do at home to assist your treatment:

- INCREASE YOUR FLUIDS- drink around 3 litres of water per day to help flush the bacteria out
- Follow an alkalizing diet- decrease refined foods and excess red meats and consume more fruits, vegetables, soups and fresh juices
- Reduce your intake of yeast and sugar containing foods in your diet- these are a preferred food source for the unfriendly bacteria we are trying to reduce.
- Eat 1-2 cloves of fresh garlic per day for additional antibacterial and immune support.
- Decrease bladder irritants such as coffee, cigarettes and alcohol
- Herbal diuretic teas can often be useful as well. One you can make at home is cornsilk tea
Just pour boiling water over the fresh silk (preferably from organic corn cobs) and allow steeping for 3-5 minutes and strain. Drink 1-3 cups per day.
Note: not for those with corn allergies. Corn silk is the stringy threads found inside the outer leaves of fresh corn cobs
- Cranberry juice (no added sugar) and Aloe Vera juice may also help as a preventative measures when drunk occasionally or daily. They help to stop the bacteria attaching to the mucous membranes therefore assisting to flush them out.

Some of the above mentioned herbs cannot be used in pregnancy and certain medical conditions so it is important to see your health practitioner before taking anything you are not certain of. Although it may seem complicated, infections such as cystitis are very treatable and nature has many powerful herbs and nutrients available to successfully clear and prevent infections of the urinary system.