

Urethritis

Urethritis is an inflammation of the urethra, which is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body. Urethritis has many causes, but sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are the most common.

If urethritis is not caused by gonorrhea, then it is called non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU). If urethritis is treated and the symptoms still continue, then it is called recurrent urethritis.

Urethritis can often be cured with antibiotics.

Causes

Urethritis is most often caused by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes simplex virus, and trichomonas. Urethritis can be passed through vaginal, oral, and anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is an exchange of body fluids or skin-to-skin contact. If you have one of these infections, you can pass it to others even if you don't have symptoms.

Urethritis can also be caused by other bacteria or trauma to the urethra.

Symptoms

Symptoms of urethritis are often worse in the morning and may include:

- pain when urinating
- abnormal discharge from your urethra
- an unusual painful itching sensation inside your urethra

Tests and Diagnosis

Testing for urethritis is usually done with an exam, urine and a swab sample. It is best to get tested for urethritis if you have symptoms, or you have a partner who has been diagnosed with urethritis.

Treatment

Urethritis is treated with prescription antibiotics. It is important to take all your medications as directed. If you miss any doses, the infection may not be cured. Go back to your health care provider if this happens, or if you still have symptoms a week after starting treatment.

It is important to not have sex (even with a condom) for a week after starting treatment. If you do have sex during this time, you could pass the infection to your sexual partner or get it again. If this happens, talk to your health care provider.

Sexual Partners

Your sexual partners within the last two months should be tested and treated for STIs. If you haven't had sex in the last two months, your last partner should be tested and treated.

There are a few ways to tell partners. You can tell partners yourself or anonymously. Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

Complications

If urethritis is treated early, there are usually no other health problems. If left untreated, it can lead to serious complications including:

- epididymitis
- infertility
- reactive arthritis

Prevention

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms reduces your chances of getting and passing the infections that can cause urethritis.

Resources

HealthLink BC – Information about urethritis in multiple languages

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/urethritis>

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about urethritis

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>