

Natural ways to combat cystitis

Article contributed by Frances Ive

One in three women get cystitis in their lives and some get recurrent attacks, but doctors can only provide antibiotics as a solution. There are plenty of ways of trying to prevent it and natural solutions when you've got it. At its worst cystitis can be excruciating. There are a number of symptoms and some can be present without the others:

- burning sensation on passing water
- pain in the lower abdomen
- pain in the lower back, the kidneys and in the ureters – the tubes from the bladder to the opening.

Often the vagina itself feels inflamed and there may be general malaise, depression and fever.

The woman may have to go to the toilet regularly and as this is a painful experience it makes it even worse. The urine becomes cloudy, smelly and often contains blood streaks, although these may not be visible to the naked eye.

The pain can be so severe that you feel like pulling your hair or sticking your nails in your palms – this is danger point and requires medical attention.

It is vital that if someone is in severe pain and has a temperature that they see a doctor immediately because it can spread to the kidneys and become very serious. At this stage self-help may not work.

Repeat attacks

Some women are particularly prone to cystitis and bladder discomfort, which may not involve an infection but means that going to the loo can feel uncomfortable afterwards with pain in the bladder situated in the lower abdomen or in the back.

The medical profession has found little to no solutions to repeated cystitis and bladder discomfort. Common treatment is by antibiotic which will certainly take away an infection fairly quickly but often has the effect of giving thrush as well. It is possible that the antibiotic you get doesn't fight the specific bug and you have to go back to the GP and get a different one.

Antibiotics don't help to prevent further attacks and unfortunately if someone has cystitis regularly repeat prescriptions eventually wear down the immune system making them more susceptible to everything!

Prevention is the answer

As there's no medical cure self-help is the only answer. Standard advice is:

- Drink plenty of water to flush out the infection;
- Avoid coffee, tea, alcohol which are all diuretics and make you go to the loo even more;
- As germs come from the anal area wipe from front to back with toilet paper;
- Don't use soaps, shower gels, bath lotions contain chemicals;
- Go to the loo immediately after intercourse and wash in a bidet or bath;
- Wear cotton pants;
- Ask your partner to wash his genitals before sex – often embarrassing!
- Intercourse triggers attacks.

Intercourse is one of the most common causes of bladder problems and it may be the position of the bladder and the womb that cause it in some females and not in others. Most women don't want to give up sex for the rest of their lives so they need to find an answer!

Cystitis is caused by bacteria going up into the bladder and causing infection. This is often because the penis causes bruising to the vaginal walls and bladder and the bruising sets up infection. If the woman is using spermicides or the cap it is more than likely that these will aggravate the condition as does menopause when the vagina becomes drier.

One of the reasons why women suffer from this debilitating problem rather than men is the position of the genitals. The anus is full of germs and is situated very close to the vagina, which is near to the ureter so it is easy for germs to move from one to the other.

Candida

Sometimes repeated attacks of cystitis are due to candida, a yeast infection that takes a hold on the system. There are plenty of symptoms of candida including fungal infections (thrush, athlete's foot), digestive problems, bloating, tiredness, lethargy.

Natural remedies

There are several over the counter solutions, many of them based on bicarbonate of soda which aims to neutralise the acid in the urine. There are also plenty of herbal and homeopathic solutions:

- Uva ursi – a herbal remedy for urinary infection
- Echinacea – boosts the immune system and can help to prevent an attack when the first twinges start
- Taking regular probiotics such as Acidophilus helps to keep the gut replenished with healthy bacteria which reduces chances of infections
- Cranberries – contain PACs (proanthocyanidins) that attach themselves to the bacteria – mostly E-coli – preventing them from attaching themselves to cells in the body. Supplements can be good but choose a juice that has no artificial sweeteners or sugar in
- Staphisagria – a homeopathic remedy for cystitis following intercourse
- Cantharis – homeopathic remedy when there is a burning sensation on going to the loo
- Witch-hazel squeezed on a piece of cotton wool at the opening to the ureter so that it can be felt right up into the tubes or held in the vagina to soothe inflammation
- Gokshura and Shatavari are Ayurvedic herbs for urinary discomfort with pain on passing water, urgency, dribbles, burning and blood streaked urine
- D-Mannose, made from the bark of the spruce tree, is a compound which is present in the urine to fight bacteria, but by providing more in a supplement it can ease cystitis

Complementary therapies

Naturopathy – looks at lifestyle and the causes of the problem which could be emotional as well as finding herbal and other natural solutions. People with bladder problems are said to be holding on to the past or they may be feeling out of control in their lives (literally!).

Useful contacts

General Council and Register of Naturopaths & British Naturopathic Association, 08707 456984 www.naturopathy.org.uk

Reflexology – particularly helpful during an attack because the reflexologist can work on the bladder area and can help it to go away entirely. Association of Reflexologists, 0870 567 3320, www.aor.org.uk

The British Association of Nutritional Therapists, 08706 061284, www.bant.org.uk

Emotional Freedom Technique – where tapping the ends of the meridians helps to get out emotional causes for illness.

The Association for the Advancement of Meridian Therapies:
www.meridiantherapy.org

Frances Ive is a writer and journalist and created the excellent website:
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Xynergy comment: Kiwiherb Echinacia and Pukka Gokshura and Shatavari are available from Xynergy.