

Antibiotics for UTI in Older Adults

A urinary tract infection (UTI) may cause symptoms like:

- Burning with urination
- Increased urge to urinate
- Need to urinate more often

Several common symptoms do not necessarily indicate a UTI:

- Confusion
- Weakness

Cloudy and/or foul-smelling urine are not symptoms of UTIs.

Urine should only be tested when UTI symptoms are present.

Antibiotics should only be given when UTI symptoms are present **and** there is evidence of infection on urine tests.

Giving antibiotics when not needed may lead to:

- Side effects
- *C. difficile* diarrhea
- Drug-resistant germs

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Antibiotics for Urinary Tract Infections in Older Adults

Information for patients & families



Urinary Tract Infections

Antibiotics are commonly used in older adults to treat Urinary Tract Infections (UTI).

UTI may cause symptoms like:

- Burning when urinating
- Strong urge to urinate
- Need to urinate often
- Pressure in lower abdomen

UTI may also cause fever, urine leakage or worsening of chronic incontinence, pain in the back or sides, or blood in the urine.

How is a UTI diagnosed?

You need the symptoms of UTI and an abnormal urine test (urinalysis or urine culture).

Unfortunately, urine testing is often not helpful in identifying older adults who need antibiotics. Many older adults may have abnormal urine tests without a UTI and often receive antibiotics when they have no UTI symptoms.

When antibiotics should be used

Antibiotics are needed if a person has UTI symptoms and/or fever.

If you do not have symptoms of a UTI, then antibiotics will not help, even when bacteria are seen in the urine.

Why should antibiotics be avoided, if not needed?

Antibiotics have side effects:

Allergic reaction, fever, rash, nausea, vomiting, kidney damage, diarrhea.

Antibiotics increase the risk for future infections:

Antibiotics can kill “good” germs natural to our body. This can lead to a potentially fatal and severe diarrhea caused by *C. difficile*.

Antibiotics promote “stronger,” resistant germs:

Antibiotics can make germs become “drug resistant,” which means they are harder to kill with commonly used antibiotics and fewer treatment choices are available.



Common myths

Sometimes, other symptoms that older adults experience can be confused with a UTI. The following symptoms do not necessarily indicate a UTI, especially if there are no other urinary symptoms or fever:

- Confusion
- Falling
- Cloudy/foul-smelling urine
- Muscle weakness

Doctors and other practitioners are not always sure what may be causing the symptoms in a patient, and sometimes the best option for the patient is observation and monitoring.