

Bladder Infections - Why Antibiotics Are Not Always Necessary

According to the recommendation from *smarter medicine / Choosing Wisely*, antibiotics should not be routinely taken for an uncomplicated bladder infection (i.e. no complications or risk factors for complications) or when bacteria are incidentally found in the urine. This applies regardless of age.

Typical Symptoms

A bladder infection presents with symptoms. Most commonly with painful and frequent urination and blood in the urine. A urine dipstick can confirm the diagnosis. Fever and flank pain may indicate complications (spread of the infection to the renal pelvis or into the bloodstream).

Risk Factors for Complications

- Pregnancy
- Anomalies of the urinary tract
- Impaired kidney function
- High blood sugar (diabetes), immunological disorders
- Permanent catheter
- Bladder infection >2x/year
- Hospitalization in the last 3 months
- Urological/gynecological procedure
- Male sex

Next Steps

Without risk factors or signs of complications, you are likely not required to take antibiotics. You can observe the progression of your symptoms for 2 days. Anti-inflammatory pain relievers can alleviate your discomfort. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids (around 1.5-2 liters of water per day). However, you should consult your primary care provider in case of fever (at least 38.3°C) or flank pain, if your condition deteriorates or if there is no improvement in symptoms after 48 hours.

If you have risk factors for complications, you should see your primary care provider. You can discuss the best course of action and whether an antibiotic treatment would be necessary.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Following This Recommendation

Advantages:

- Reduction in the use of antibiotics and associated risks (e.g. resistance, side effects, drug interactions)

Disadvantages:

- Symptoms may last 2 days longer (approx. 4 days instead of 2)
- 1-3% risk for complications