

Urinary tract infection (catheter-associated): antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

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Urinary tract infections with catheters: do I need antibiotics?

A catheter is a tube that is inserted in the bladder to drain urine. It can let bacteria into the body, and this can lead to a bladder or kidney infection (urinary tract infection, or UTI).

Bacteria are often found in the urine of people with catheters. You should only be offered antibiotics if you're getting symptoms of a UTI. These include pain in the lower abdomen (tummy area), and cloudy, blood-stained or strong-smelling urine. You might also have fever or chills, or pain in your back.

Your nurse or doctor may also change or remove your catheter if you have had the same one in place for a week or more.

You can also help your symptoms in other ways, for example, by taking paracetamol and drinking plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

Antibiotics are not needed if you don't have UTI symptoms, even if tests show you have bacteria in your urine.

Starting antibiotics

If you're offered antibiotics your doctor should explain that they can cause side effects, such as diarrhoea and nausea (feeling sick).

You should see your doctor if you don't start to feel better 2 days after you start antibiotics, or sooner if you start to feel worse.

Your doctor may refer you for specialist advice if you have signs of a more serious illness or if you are pregnant, severely dehydrated or at higher risk of complications.

Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

The NHS website has more information about:

- [catheter-associated UTIs](#)
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the recommendations are based on the best research available.

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